THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

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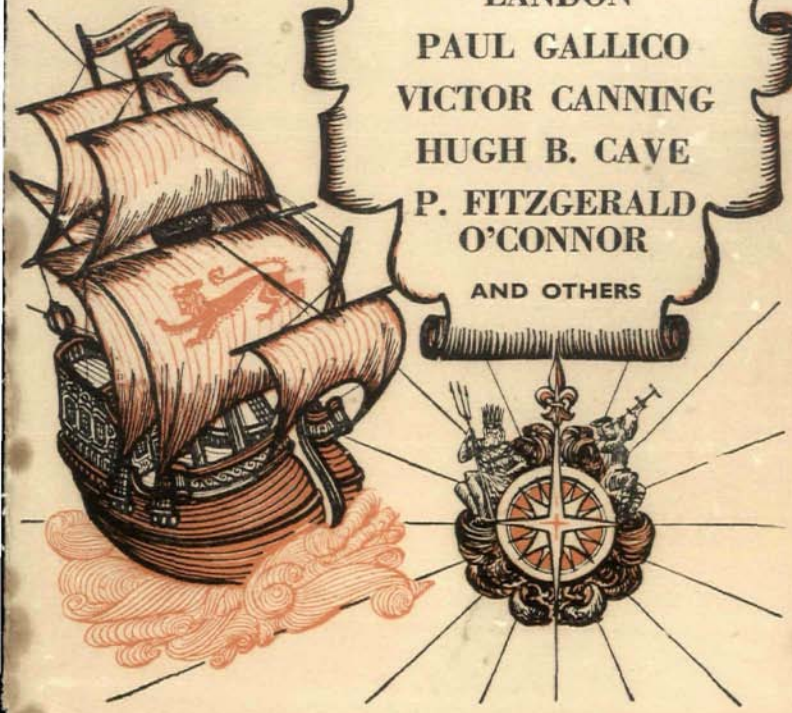

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ARGOSY

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LOVE GIFTS

She threw a quince to me;
In requital I gave a bright girdle-gem.
No, not just as requital;
But meaning I would love her for ever.

She threw a tree-peach to me;
As requital I gave her a bright greenstone.
No, not just as requital;
But meaning I would love her for ever.

She threw a tree-plum to me;
In requital I gave her a bright jet-stone.
No, not just as requital,
But meaning I would love her for ever.

ARTHUR WALEY

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REVELATION

BY RHYS DAVIES

THE men of the day shift were threading their way out of the colliery. The cage had just clanked up into the daylight, the tightly packed men had poured out and deposited their lamps, the cage swishing down again for the next lot, and hitching their belts and shaking themselves in the sunlight, these released workers of the underworld began their journey over the hill down to the squat grey town that was in the bed of the valley.

As he was passing the power-house, just before depositing his lamp, one of these colliers heard his name called from its doorway. "Gomer Vaughan. A moment, please."

Gomer went over to the man who called him.

"You live near my house, don't you, Vaughan? I wonder would you mind calling there to tell my wife I won't be home until about eight this evening? I've got a job on here, tell her, and I can't leave it. You see, she's expecting me now . . . Hope it's no trouble?"

Of course it wasn't. Gomer was glad to take the chief engineer's message. Montague was liked by all the miners: a chief engineer with sympathetic principles, though an Englishman. Gomer nodded and resumed his way, soon regaining the particular companions with whom he always walked home. They were all young men.

"What's the blighter want?" asked one. Gomer told him.

"She's a beauty, she is," said another, meaning Mrs. Montague. "Proud of herself, too, strutting about and looking as though the world's no more than ninepence to her."

"Got something to be proud of she has," returned a short, terrier-looking fellow, perking himself to have his say. "A sprightlier bird never trod on two legs. Half French, they say. She makes our lot look like a crowd of wet and panicky hens. Got something our skirts don't seem to have."

"I wouldn't," said the eldest of them critically, "swop her for my old 'ooman. Too much opinion of herself she has, by the look on her. A spirited mare she is in the house, I bet."

Gomer said nothing. He was the latest married of the company. He did not want to say anything on this subject of women.

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Though he could say a lot, by God he could! He could let flow some language—a lot of language.

But he held himself tight, his eyes glittering, while the others went on as men will, saying what they'd up and do if any woman had too much lip and bossiness.

He had been married a year, and he was all raw and fiery from his encounters with Blodwen. God, he never thought a woman could be so contrary. Soft and simpering as she was before they married. Well, he'd show her yet . . . And as the colliers swung along together Gomer planked his huge nailed boots down on the pavement with a vicious firmness.

They had descended the hill, and as they reached the long dismal rows of dwellings that constituted the town, they separated to climb to their different homes. Gomer lived in the last row reaching up the side of the greyish-green hill. At the end of this row was a detached house, where the engineer and his wife lived. The lonely bare hill swept up above it. Gomer had to pass his own cottage to climb to the villa.

There was a soft mist in the still air. Gomer wished there was a country lane of shady trees with a clean stream running near, in this part of Wales. He would have liked to stroll there in peace that evening. But no—after his meal and bath there would be nowhere to go but the street corners, the miserable pub, or the bare, uninviting hills.

Ah, what a life! Gomer sighed. The same thing day after day. Down to the pit, up again, food, bath, quarrel with Blodwen, slam the door, and then a miserable couple of hours trying to jaw to the fellows on the street corner, and back home to see Blodwen's face with the jibe on it still.

He cleared his throat and spat before opening the gate of the garden. He had had enough of her tantrums, and if she wanted a fight he was ready for her. Trying to dictate to him, just as her mother had tried it on him. Save up to buy a piano indeed! And no one in the house who could play it. He'd give her piano!

He knocked the shining brass image on the villa door and glanced about. Natty house. Bright little garden—a rose garden. There were bushes and bushes of them; he'd never seen such big red and white roses. And such a smell! He almost snorted as he breathed in and emitted the perfume.

No one had answered his knock. He turned and knocked again. Where was the servant? Keeping him hanging about like this. He wanted his dinner. He knocked again. Then there came sounds of steps, upstairs it seemed, and as the steps sounded nearer, hurrying downstairs, a shrill voice called, "Can't you wait a minute, darling?"

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It was Mrs. Montague, of course, Gomer said to himself. She thought her husband was at the door. And there was laughter and excitement in her voice. Ah, that was the way to greet a tired husband coming home from work. An excited voice calling darling. Made a man think a woman was worthy to be a wife . . .

The door was flung wide open.

Gomer's tongue clave in astonishment to his mouth. The gaping silence lasted several moments. A naked woman stood before him, and then slowly, slowly retreated, her fist clenched in the cleft between her breasts.

" Mr. . . . Mr. . . . Montague asked me . . ." stammered Gomer, and could not switch his rigid gaze from the apparition. How lovely she was! ". . . told me . . . said . . ." His voice dropped, and he stared at her like one possessed.

She turned at the foot of the stairs . . . fled up; and it was like the flutter of some great white bird to heaven.

". . . told me to tell you he couldn't come home at all until eight o'clock just . . ." suddenly bawled Gomer into the empty passage-way.

He waited a few seconds, wondering if she would answer. He heard her hurry about upstairs. Then she appeared again, wrapped now in a loose blue garment. Her face was flushed as she came down the stairs, but as she advanced to him she laughed. By God, how she laughed! Gomer felt his blood run. She wasn't ashamed, not she. And still her white feet were bare. They were bare and flawless, and like lilies pressed on the floor.

"What is that about my husband? " she asked easily.

Gomer told her. Under the pit-dirt his cheeks burnt.

She thanked him very prettily, and then she said, " I thought it was he at the door. I'm sure you'll understand. I was having a bath. You are married, I expect? " Gomer nodded.

She looked up at his gazing eyes again in a queer laughing way, and said in dismissal, " Oh well. Thank you very much for the message."

He turned at last, and the door closed. He stepped out of the porch and, his eyes lifted in thoughtful amazement, made his way slowly to the gate. Never before had he seen a naked woman. Not a live one. Only in pictures. Respectable women—it had always been understood—kept themselves a mystery to men. But was that quite right? Ought they to keep themselves such a mystery? When they were so beautiful. Surely Mrs. Montague was respectable enough! Her husband was a fine respected man, too. He wouldn't have things done that weren't right . . . Gomer suddenly made a decision that it was quite natural for a woman to meet her husband naked. It was lovely too

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As he opened the gate he saw a rose-bush stretched up the wall. There were several curled pink-flushed roses. One bloom wouldn't be missed. His hand immediately snatched a flower, and when he got outside the gate, he laid it in his food-tin.

Gomer's shoulders seemed squared and defiant as he went down at a quickened pace to his cottage. He was going to make his peace with Blodwen. But he was not going to be a namby-pamby fool, either. After all, she was his wife, and he was not an unreasonable man. He had been fond of her, too; and there were times when he thought her handsome enough for any man.

"You're late," she said accusingly. And before waiting for him to reply, she went on shrilly, "Don't you blame me if the dinner's spoilt."

"Which means it is, I suppose!" he said. But he smiled at her, his good white teeth shining out in his blackened face.

"Come in at your proper time, then," she rapped out, prodding the meat viciously.

He leaned forward and playfully slapped her on the back. She uttered a scream, and the meat slid off its plate, hesitated on the edge of the table, and fell on the floor.

His action and the ensuing accident had an exaggerated effect on Blodwen. She arched up her long neck in a tight, rigid fashion, her face flamed, and she darted out into the little scullery like an infuriated turkey.

"I've had enough," she screamed, "and more than enough!" And she banged some crockery about.

"Now then," Gomer called to her soothingly, "now *then*, my pet. What's the damage? A bit of dust on the old meat! Look, it's all right. Now, Blod, behave yourself. Where's the taters? I'm hungry."

He knew she'd find his gentle coaxing astonishing. Another time he would have hurled abuse at her. But she remained in the scullery. He sighed and went in there. She turned her back on him and went to the tap.

He followed her and whispered in her pink ear, "Now, now, what's got you, my darling? There's a way to treat a tired man who's been working hard as he can to get you a bit of dough. Turn about, Blod, and show me your face laughing, the same as you used to! Look, look what I've got you—" He lifted his hidden hand and tickled her ear with the rose, then reached it to her nose. "Smell! Put it in your blouse."

She turned, and said angrily, "What do I want with a rose in my working-blouse! Where did you get it whatever?" She was relenting.

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"Ah, my secret that is."

"Oh well," she said, tossing her head, "put it in a cup on the table."

During the meal she reverted again to the piano controversy. "A catalogue came today from Jones and Evans. Cheaper they seem than anyone else. There's one that works out at seven and six a week."

His brows were drawn in wrathfully for a moment. He did not speak. She went on talking, and at last he cropped in: "We'll see, we'll see."

The meal finished, a big wooden tub was dragged into the place before the fire, the mat rolled up. Blodwen, sturdy enough, lifted the huge pan of boiling water from the fire and poured it in the tub. Gomer stripped. The pit-dirt covered his body. Blodwen added cold water, and Gomer stepped into the tub. While he washed she cleared away the dinner things. She was quick and deft enough in her work, and the house was bright and neat.

"I'm ready for my back," Gomer called.

"Wait a minute," she said coldly, taking the remainder of the dishes into the scullery.

So he had to wait, standing in the tub, with the patch of coal-dust beneath his shoulders glaring on the whiteness of the rest of his body. He knew she was exercising her own contrary will again. He might have yelled at her, but today he didn't want to. He was holding himself tight in glowing anticipation.

When she came at last to rub the hand-cloth over his back and swill him down, he said nothing. Only grunted when she had finished, "Not much respect have you got for a man's naked skin, Blod. You rub me as though I'm a bit of old leather."

"Bah!" said Blodwen. "A nice little powder-puff I'll get for you."

He laughed, lingeringly and good-temperedly. He wanted to get her in a good mood. "Ah," he said with affection, "one of these days, Blod fach, perhaps you'll come to know what a nice skin your husband's got on him."

"Conceit!" she said, and would not look as he vigorously towelled himself.

Early that evening, when he sat comfortable and easy by the fire, he said to her, as she was about to go upstairs and change, "You're not going out this evening, are you, Blod?"

"Yes. I'm going to the chapel."

"Don't you go this evening, if you please," he said.

Amazement was now evident on her face. This politeness and interference with her arrangements was quite unusual. "Oh, indeed!" she began, ready for a battle.

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He cocked his tight-skinned, sturdy young head up at her. His eyes gleamed; there was an odd smile on his lips. "Well, go and change first," he said.

She shrugged her shoulders and went upstairs.

He sat waiting for her. She appeared in a peach-coloured silky dress. Her face shone clean. She was prepared for the women's meeting at the chapel.

He looked at her appraisingly, and said softly, "Come here, Blod."

"What d'you want now?" she demanded, withheld in spite of her coldness. She moved near to his chair—but apparently to the mantelshelf looking for something.

"You're looking nice tonight," he said. And he suddenly leaned out of his chair and caught her. She cried out, disliking this horseplay in her best silk dress. But he held her, and she had to keep still. Then he whispered a few words in her ear.

She suddenly wrenched herself free and slapped his face. He sprang up. His face and slender, tightened neck were mottled.

"Indeed," she breathed, "indeed! You rude ruffian! What d'you take me for, indeed? Please to remember I'm your wife, will you? I'll teach you to respect me, Gomer Vaughan." Yet there was an undercurrent of fear in her breathed words of contempt and horror.

But he had caught fire. His head lurched towards her. He shouted, "That's just it, my fine lady. Remember you are my wife I'm doing. Look here, you. Enough of your silly airs and graces I've had. A lodger in this house I might be. You do what I tell you to, now."

"Never!" she screamed. "Such rudeness I've never heard of."

"What's in it?" he demanded furiously. "You see *me*, don't you, when I wash?"

She was retreating from him in obvious fear now. "Never have I heard of such a thing!" she exclaimed. Her face was contracted, her eyes were strange and hunted. "Never. A woman is different from a man . . . And never do I look at you—not in that way."

He was advancing to her. She saw the clear determination burning in his eye. With a sudden quick movement she darted out of the room and he sprang too late. She was out of the house. He heard the front door slam.

He knew where she had fled. Twice before, after their more furious clashings, she had hurried off to her mother's—Mrs. Hopkins, a widow, who kept a sweet-shop. Mrs. Hopkins had come up "to see him about it" afterwards. No doubt she would come this evening. He hated her.

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She arrived half an hour later. Directly Gomer saw her pale, large, aggressive face, he buckled in his belt and thrust out his chin.

"What's this I hear from my Blodwen, Gomer Vaughan?" she began with shocked asperity. She looked startled this time.

He uttered an exclamation of contemptuous ire. "That daughter of yours got no right to be a wife at all, Lizzie Hopkins," he fumed. "Running to her mother like a little filly! And don't *you* come here poking your nose in this business, either. You go back and tell your silly daughter to return at once to the man she's married. See?" And he turned his back on her abruptly.

"Well you might look ashamed," Mrs. Hopkins replied in a rising voice, "well you might. Scandalous is the thing I have heard from Blodwen now just. Advice she has asked me. Gomer Vaughan, a respectable man I thought you. Please you remember that my daughter is a religious girl, brought up in a good family that's never had a breath of scandal said about them. And now you want her to be a party to these goings-on." Her voice reached a dangerous pitch. "Dreadful is this thing I have heard. Surely not fit to be married to a respectable girl you are! Shame on you, man, shame on you. What my poor dead Rowland would have said I can imagine. Why, Gomer Vaughan, for forty years I was married to him, and never once was I obliged to show myself in that awful way! Don't you fear the wrath of God, man, don't you think of His eye watching?"

Gomer retained an admirable silence through this tirade. His thumbs stuck in his belt, he spat on the fire, and said, "Pah, you narrow-minded old bigot, you."

Mrs. Hopkins began to breathe heavily. "Insult and rudeness! Would my poor Rowland was here! And would my dear girl was single again!"

Gomer lost his balance then. He turned and shouted, "You be quiet! What do you understand about young married people today? Interfering! Turning Blodwen's ideas the wrong way. A girl she is, isn't she, then? Nothing extraordinary was it that I asked her. Only today was it I saw such a thing."

Mrs. Hopkins said quickly, "Who?"

In his ire Gomer incautiously answered, as though to strengthen his case, "Mr. Montague's wife. I—"

But Mrs. Hopkins broke in with a loud exclamation: "Ha! So that's it, then. Ha, now I understand well enough. *She* is the one, is it? Long have I had my feelings about her . . . Very well, Gomer Vaughan, very well—" And she began to back out of the room, her heavy head nodding with hidden menace, her pale eyes fixed on him triumphantly.

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Gomer shouted at her, "You send Blodwen back here at once."

Mrs. Hopkins whisked her bulky figure out of the doorway in a surprisingly swift way. "We'll see, young man," she darted back over her shoulder, "we'll see."

But Gomer had no doubts that Blodwen would return.

And so she came back—sooner than he expected. Mrs. Hopkins scarcely had time to reach home and impart whatever she had to say, and Blodwen was dashing into the room where her husband sat in brooding wrath.

"You," she panted, "you been seeing that woman!"

She looked as though she wanted to leap on him. But like an enraged hound on leash she stood prancing and glaring wildly. "That's where you been when you came home late! That's your monkey's game, is it?"

"Now, *now*, Blodwen—" he began. Then he was silent, and he did not attempt to deny her accusation. There was a wolfish grin about his mouth. Blodwen continued to heap vituperation upon him. She became wilder and wilder. And he liked her fierce, savage beauty. She had a splendour thus. His grin widened.

She became desperate. "Not another night will I spend in this house. Gladly will my mother welcome me back—"

He decided she had reached the pinnacle of fear. He got up and went to her. She shrank away and he followed. He took her arms firmly and with power.

"Long enough I've listened to your insults, Blod. Where did you get that idea from that I've been running loose? Eh? Has that old bitch been lying to you, then?"

"You told her you been seeing Mrs. Montague naked—"

"Well, well, and so I have."

Blodwen struggled to be free. "Oh, oh!" she cried aloud.

"Some women there are," he said, "who are not so mean as you about their prettiness. Mrs. Montague's got very good ideas how to make her husband happy. Listen, my silly little pet . . ." And he told her of the afternoon's event.

She became quiet. Surprise, astonishment, and amazement leapt successively to her wild-coloured face. And also there came a slow and wondering dawn in her eyes.

"There now," Gomer finished. "See how ready you are to think evil of me. And here I came home wishing to see a better sight than Mrs. Montague could give me. And well I could have it too, only you been brought up wrong. That's where the mischief is. Too much shame you have been taught, by half."

Blodwen's head was a little low. The curve of her healthy,

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red-gold cheek filled him with tenderness. And magnanimity. He said softly, "I tell you what, Blod. We'll strike a bargain. You want that piano bad, don't you? Well, say now, we'll give way to one another—"

She hung her head lower. Some threads of her brown hair touched his lips. He quivered. His hand slipped over her shoulder. But she would not speak.

"And be nice to each other," he continued, "not always squabbering as your mother and father used to do! Live in our own way we must, Blod . . . There now, isn't she a sweet one? There, ah! sweet as a rose, my darling, a better pink and white than any rose's . . . there, my pet, my angel!"

★ *Permanently beset by the pleasant conviction that he is about to embark for foreign climes, Rhys Davies cheerfully admits to few worldly possessions and an allergy to "settling down." Primary likes include oil lamps, the theatre, owls, cats, walking, and conversation at night. Dislikes: detective stories, science fiction, card games, hot sunshine, buying clothes—and Welsh choral singing.*

He never works and rarely talks in the morning, cultivates Ruined Characters by way of relaxation, and indulges in one paradoxical dream—of settling down in a lighthouse!

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COCKATOO

BY

DOREEN MUNRO

THE house stood back from the road in an almost furtive isolation. The paint had flaked from the bulging weather-board years ago; part of the iron roofing was loose and banged desolately when the wind blew hot from the north. Scrubby fir trees hemmed it in, keeping out even the violent sunlight of an Australian December. The wires hung slack from the posts, and the gate, wedged back by a log, had long since abandoned any pretence of guardianship.

It was neither in the township, nor quite outside it. The red road, strewn with stones, which ran past the fence, was not much more than a bush-track, and beyond it stretched the bush itself, arid and sweltering. But opposite, in an unappetizing cluster, stood a group of shacks—they were not much more—including a dingy pub and a dilapidated general store. The yard was simply half an acre of bush, loosely fenced off, but the blossoming creeper, tumbling in a golden cascade over the verandah railing, made a splash of colour beyond the sombre shadow of the fir trees.

Four o'clock on a December afternoon and the earth breathless and beaten by the onslaught of the summer's first heat-wave. An impish little wind teased the firs, bringing with it the threat of the dreaded north-easterly. In the stagnant pools among the old disused mine-pits, the bullfrogs were tuning up for their evening concert.

Slowly, along the slack wire of the fence, picking his way with beak and claw, cautious and dignified, moved a white cockatoo. He was making, with steady deliberation, for the gate-post. He climbed onto it, preened his wings with a self-congratulatory gurgle, and inquired plaintively of the empty afternoon, "Who wants Cocky?"

Apparently nobody did.

The cockatoo raised his brilliant yellow crest and scratched

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carefully behind it. His black, unwinking eyes stared fixedly down the red road. Then he began to dance, flirting his wings and bowing from side to side, while he intoned in a high, shrill singsong, " Malcolm! Malcolm! Malcolm! "

In the distance, a small figure was coming into sight: a little boy, bare-headed in spite of the threatening sun, barefooted in defiance of the stony road, scuffling the dust with lagging feet. A battered satchel bumped against his back. His brown cheek bulged with a half-sucked lolly. His eyes were screwed up against the sunlight; a shock of fair hair contrasted startlingly with the deep tan of his skin.

Across the still heat of the summer afternoon came the bird's shrill cry, " Malcolm! Malcolm! "

He scowled. He hated that bird sometimes, imitating his mother's call when he was little and she used to mind about where he was. Now she never called him, or seemed to know when he came or went. It was beastly, the way the bird reminded him.

He was drawing near the gate now and could see the creature, still dancing its grotesque welcome, flirting its yellow crest, reiterating its call with a shrill, insistent mockery.

He paused to flip a stone towards the gate-post. " Aw, shut up, Cocky," he muttered savagely, shifting the lolly from one cheek to the other.

The bird put his head on one side, extended a wing, and scratched meditatively. " Kiss Cocky," he croaked, adding plaintively, " Cocky want a drink! "

Malcolm relented. " Good-oh! " he said. " Come and get it, then." He paused by the gate-post and held out a scratched brown hand.

The cockatoo sidled up his arm and settled himself on the boy's shoulder. " Kiss Cocky! " he said again, and gently bit his ear.

Malcolm walked slowly between the fir trees and onto the rickety verandah.

The house was of that older colonial pattern that imitated its English forbears. The front door opened directly into a dark little hall, comparatively cool after the glaring heat of the afternoon. Malcolm stood peering uncertainly into the shadows. Always he hated this moment, wondering if she would be there, as once she had always been, to greet his return; summoning his courage to call; shrinking from the desolate certainty that she was out, that the house, once again, was empty.

Timidly, his throat tight with the effort, he called, " Hiya, Mum! are you there? "

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But there was no answer. The hot wind was rising, making the fir trees stir uneasily, banging the loose, corrugated iron. Little eddies of dust swirled on the unswept floor. The silence of the house weighed on him like something tangible.

It was broken by the rusty croak of the cockatoo. "Cocky want a drink!"

"Aw, shut up, you old cow!" Impatiently Malcolm pushed the creature from his shoulder, venting on the bird his bitter disappointment.

Cocky, affronted, fluttered to the floor, nipped his ankle viciously, and waddled off down the hall, remarking truculently, "Come on, Ma! Get a bloody wriggle on!"

Malcolm grinned unwillingly and followed him. On his left, the door of his mother's room stood open. He glanced in but hastily looked away again, shrinking with unconscious fastidiousness from its littered squalor. The bed was unmade; over the foot drooped a blowzy series of discarded garments; a line of spilt powder trailed uncertainly across the floor from the cluttered dressing-table.

Suddenly, shrilly, the telephone rang.

Malcolm started involuntarily. Somehow the bell was frightening, ringing aggressively in the empty silence. But it might be Mum; he must answer it. Sometimes she did ring up to see if he was all right. Unwillingly he turned into the little lounge and lifted the receiver.

"That you, Madge?" said a man's voice.

"No," answered Malcolm. "Mum's out."

"Oh!" said the voice, evidently taken aback. "That you, kid? Tell yer Ma I rang and I'll be round. Jim Ross speaking."

Malcolm was silent. He resented Jim Ross and his habit of "being round" from the depth of his young soul.

"Hey, kid," said the voice impatiently, "did you hear?"

"Yes," said Malcolm, unwillingly. "I heard. I'll tell her."

"That's the boy," said the voice, and rang off.

Slowly he replaced the receiver and stood for a moment, one grubby bare foot rubbing a scratched brown leg, seeing Jim Ross, with his bold blue eyes, his springy black hair that smelt of cheap scent, and his breath that smelt even more strongly of spirits; remembering the way he sat, sprawled on the sofa opposite, his coat flung over the back of a chair, his blue shirt open, showing tufts of coarse black hair, a muscular brown arm round Mum's shoulder; remembering his voice, deep and husky and somehow mocking, saying, "Beat it, now, like a good kid. Go get yerself an ice-cream."

He dimly sensed a connection between Jim and the forlorn,

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neglected house to which he so often returned. Somehow, Jim threatened him. If it were not for Jim . . .

A sudden squawk startled him into awareness of his surroundings. Round the half-open door peered a black eye, unwinking, malevolent; the yellow crest was raised belligerently. The creature opened its beak and emitted a sound like a siren, rising and falling in an uncanny wail.

" Darn you, shut *up*! " exclaimed Malcolm.

The cockatoo subsided. " Cocky want a drink? " he croaked.

For Malcolm, the kitchen was the one room in the house that felt like home. Here, in the big, creaking basket-chair, his mother used to sit when he was small, mending, in desultory fashion, socks and stockings, telling him stories sometimes, alternately teasing and indulging him with her queer, one-sided smile. Small, she was, with an elusive charm in her shining dark eyes and loosely curling, soft black hair; kind, too, when the mood took her, but more often withdrawn and remote, looking at Malcolm as though she could not imagine how he came to be there at all. It made him feel lonely, that look of hers, as though he did not really belong.

When—as so often now—she was out, there was the big old-fashioned wireless in the corner to give him some sort of company, and a pile of comics and westerns in the dresser cupboard to help him escape from loneliness. And there was always the cockatoo.

Just now the bird was climbing awkwardly up the back of a chair, making towards the edge of the sink. Malcolm turned on the cold tap and reached for the small tin pannikin. The water was warm, almost hot, and he waited, watching it trickle over the back of his grubby hand, until it became first cool, and then cold and refreshing. He filled the little cup and held it out to the bird. Cocky sipped delicately, tilting his head back and swallowing with obvious enjoyment. Five or six times he sipped, then sidled towards Malcolm, remarking affectionately, " Give Cocky a kiss, love? "

Absently the boy tickled the soft feathers beneath the bird's beak, glancing meanwhile out of the kitchen window. It was not yet five o'clock, but the fiercest heat was over and the sun was low in the sky, hanging in a saffron glow above the dusty plain. Time stretched interminably ahead of him. Idly he switched on the wireless. After a protesting splutter, the thing cleared its throat and a syrupy voice began to croon:

Just a place in the sun
My particular one
On a tropical avenue . . .

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It was better than the sultry silence. In spite of the heat, the stove was alight, but the wood-box was almost empty. Better chop some kindling and put a kettle on. If he filled the big one right up, it would take a fair time to come to the boil. Mum liked a cup of tea when she came in.

It took half an hour to fill the wood-box, with the sweat trickling between his shoulder-blades and into his eyes. Carefully he set a tray ready, with Mum's best silver tea-pot and the willow-pattern china. Still it was only a quarter to six.

Thoughtfully, Malcolm explored his pockets. Somewhere, he thought, there ought to be a sixpence. There was. He could go over to the store and buy a coke.

It would be company, too. Mrs. Symes, fat, friendly, and garrulous, had a warm corner in her heart for small boys, having reared five of her own in her time. He switched off the wireless, set the kettle far back on the stove, and made for the front door, out through the fir trees, into the dusty gold of late afternoon, and across the red road.

From the verandah rail, with black, expressionless eyes the cockatoo watched him go.

Symes's general store shared in the haphazard good humour of its owners. Fishing-tackle and farming implements collided with groceries, which in their turn overflowed inconsequently into ladies' underwear. A counter near the door was stacked high with cigarettes, lollies, westerns, and comics. Half-empty packing-cases provided a resting-place for customers, which was just as well, for the word " haste " was not included in the Symes vocabulary.

This evening, Mrs. Symes, comfortably arrayed in a garment that had once been a housecoat, her bare feet thrust into shabby carpet-slippers, was entrenched behind the sweet counter.

" 'Ullo, love," she greeted Malcolm. " Want a cold drink? "

He nodded, and thrust the sticky sixpence across the counter.

Mrs. Symes reached for a glass and searched ponderously beneath the counter for a bottle. Emerging a little flushed, she removed the top expertly, while her friendly brown eyes rested with an expression of concern on the oddly forlorn little figure.

" Mum out? " she said.

" Yes," answered Malcolm briefly.

He sensed her motherly compassion and did not want it—not from Mrs. Symes.

Wisely she pursued the subject no further, but handed him the glass and a penny change.

" Sit down," she invited, " and keep me company for a bit.

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Ain't bin no one in this last hour or more. The boss is in town and won't be back till late."

Malcolm seated himself readily enough on a handy packing-case, and sipped his drink. He liked the store; it was friendly and comfortable. He liked Mrs. Symes, too, for much the same reason.

The rise and fall of her voice was soothing, though he hardly listened to what she said, for he had heard it all before. Instead, he watched the great golden bars of light slanting in through the high windows, investing the gleaming ranks of tins with an alien glory, and listened dreamily to the melancholy chorus of the bullfrogs.

"My!" said Mrs. Symes, suddenly interrupting herself, "getting quite late it is! Better be locking up."

"O.K., Mrs. Symes," said Malcolm, sliding down from the packing-case. "I'll be off."

"No call for that," she answered. "Wait till I get tea, and stay and have a bite with me. All that sickly tack ain't no good to yez."

Looked as though he could do with a square meal, the boy did, and the lord only knew when he'd get one, in that queer set-up over the road.

She led the way to the warm, airless little kitchen in the haphazard shack alongside the store. Soon it was highly spiced with the smell of grilling steak and onions. As the heat grew steadily more overpowering, Malcolm moved over to the open window.

A last glow of gold ringed the dark horizon; against that light, the house, with its clustered fir trees, stood out, black and unwelcoming.

With a small sigh, he turned back to the crowded little room, where a kerosene lamp now added to the stifling heat. Mrs. Symes was slapping liberal helpings of steak and onions onto thick white plates.

"There, love," she said. "You eat that while it's good and hot, and I'll brew the tea."

Soon they were both contentedly munching, and sipping the strong, sweet brew, while Christmas beetles buzzed and blundered round the lamp, or thudded onto the table, where they lay ridiculously waving helpless legs.

As they were washing the supper dishes, Mrs. Symes glanced at the black unlighted bulk of the house across the road.

"Bessie Spriggs come in this morning," she remarked. "Wants me to pop in and see her tonight. Her and me's doing the Christmas decorations at the Church. You stay here, love,

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and keep an eye on things. If yer Mum comes in, you'll see the light through the winder." She shuffled out through the back door and along a side passage.

It was very still in the little kitchen when her footsteps had died away. The cry of the bullfrogs had swelled now to its full power, mournful and menacing. Mosquitoes whined insistently, mingling their shrill complaint with the heavy drone of the beetles. Outside, the wind had dropped and the moon was rising, changing the arid landscape to an etching of black and silver.

The night was breathlessly hot. Curled up in the broken-springed armchair that faced the window, Malcolm felt drowsiness invading him; two or three times his eyelids dropped, but he forced them open. He must watch to see the light go on in the house. If Mum came home, she might be worried. If Mum came home . . .

He was asleep.

On the mantelpiece, the cheap little clock ticked away. Beyond the window, moonlight made a silver brilliance; the cadence of the bullfrogs rose and fell in a mournful rhythm. But still the boy slept on.

He was dreaming. In his dream he was lost and his mother was calling him; over and over again she called his name, "Malcolm! Malcolm! Malcolm!" She was calling him; she wanted him—he must go to her.

He stirred uneasily, moaned a little, and was suddenly wide awake. The cry still sounded in his ears.

Raucous and mocking, through the stillness of the moonlight came the meaningless cry of the cockatoo, "Malcolm! Malcolm! Malcolm!"

He stood swaying uncertainly on his feet, staring at the unfamiliar room, dream and reality, hope and disappointment a blurred confusion in his mind. Memory stirred, and his glance swung to the window.

In the house across the road, a light was burning. He was through the back door and stumbling down the dark little passageway.

He had been half asleep; it *might* not have been the cockatoo. Perhaps Mum had really called. Perhaps she was anxious. Perhaps she wanted him.

Out of the dark passage he ran, into the milky radiance of the moonlight, across the road, between the sagging gate-posts, and up the path, until in the shadow of the trees before the verandah, he paused, sobbing for breath.

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The light shone from his mother's room, but the blind was down. On the verandah rail sat the cockatoo, yellow crest erect, opening and shutting his beak, but for once making no sound. Suddenly, etched sharp and distinct against the blind, appeared his mother's shadow. Her hair was down and she was wearing her long housecoat.

It must be late. Gee, she'd be mad at him! He opened his lips to call. At the same moment the cockatoo emitted the banshee wail of the local factory siren. Over and over again, the hoarse, uncanny screaming shivered the hot stillness of the night.

" Aw, shut up," muttered Malcolm, and stopped.

Another shadow had appeared upon the blind, taller than his mother's and much broader. The shadow of a man. The shadow of . . .

To end any possibility of doubt, a voice spoke, deep, drawling, hatefully familiar. " Damn that bloody bird! Here, Madge, give us the water-jug."

Then his mother's voice, low, warm, and caressing: " Idiot! A glass would do it—"

The cockatoo, abandoning the siren wail, gave a series of derisive squawks. In the stifling shadows, Malcolm cowered against a sheltering tree-trunk.

With a noise like a pistol shot, the blind went up. They stood together, framed in the window, his mother and Jim Ross. Her dark hair curling on her shoulders, her dark eyes looking, it seemed, straight at the boy, she leaned against the man beside her, smoking a cigarette, smiling her remote, one-sided smile.

She pointed with her cigarette. " There he is," she said.

Malcolm shrank back in utter terror. But it was the cockatoo she meant.

The stream of water hit the bird fair and square. With a squawk it fluttered to the ground, waddling indignantly round the side of the house.

The pair in the window laughed together, watching it out of sight.

She was sitting on the window-sill now, idly playing with the blind-cord. " Wish I knew where that kid had got to," she said. " He's not often as late as this. Must be after nine."

" Aw, forget it," answered the man. " He's over with old Ma Symes. She's got a shine on him. Thinks you neglect him, I expect. And probably not far wrong. Come to think of it, I don't know how you ever got yourself landed with a kid."

Intimate, provocative, she laughed up at him. " *You* should know! But I've often wondered the same thing myself." Lazily she rose and pulled down the blind.

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For a moment the two shadows stood out in sharp relief. Then the light went out.

Malcolm found that he was clinging to the trunk of a fir tree as though his last hope of life depended on it. He shivered uncontrollably, gripped by a sense of such deadly hurt as he dared not try to explore. Above all, shame flooded him, a deep, inexplicable sense of shame. Somehow he must escape from the dark oblong of the window, hide himself away, if possible for ever, from this woman—this stranger—who had not ever wanted him.

Mastering the shaking of his legs, he crept out of the shadows into the moonlight; skirting the verandah, he edged his way round the side of the house. As he went, he was muttering, though he did not know it, "I hate him! I'll kill him! I'll kill him!"

He had reached the back of the house now and stood facing the wood-pile where he had chopped the kindling that afternoon. At his feet lay the axe, as he had dropped it, propped against a log. He stood looking down at it, trying to master the uncontrollable shivering that had seized him again.

"I'll kill him," he whispered. "I'll kill him. I'll kill him."

In the wood-pile, something stirred and rustled. A small white blur in the moonlight, the cockatoo was climbing, steadily and deliberately, to the top of the piled logs. As he pursued his solemn, sideways shuffle, he remarked, with startling distinctness, "Come on, Cocky! Ma's a lousy bitch!"

A red mist swam before the boy's eyes. He tried to shout, but only a hoarse whisper came. "You dare! you dare call her that! I hate him! I'll kill him!"

Struggling and panting, his hands slippery with perspiration, he struggled to raise the axe. With a supreme effort, he gripped and lifted it, ready to strike at—what? Jim Ross? His mother? The cockatoo?

Perhaps he hardly knew.

The bird, startled, fluttered sideways and took refuge on the fence.

The impetus of his blow flung the child forward, sprawling on his face among the wood-chips. The shock of the fall made him once more only a little boy, lost and bewildered. Flat on his face, he released the pent-up misery of months, the horror of the last ten minutes, in a passion of sobbing.

The lovely, dispassionate moonlight poured down upon him. The rhythmic lament of the bullfrogs echoed his grief. The house, black, silent, inscrutable, loomed above him.

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Gradually the sobs died away into an exhausted silence.

A few moments passed. Then a hoarse voice rose above the croaking of the bullfrogs.

"Kiss Cocky!" it said blandly. "Scratch Cocky! Cocky's a lovely boy!"

★ ★ ★

POT LUCK

Help yourself to our new dish of teasers. Total score should amount to 23. Answers given on page 143

1. *True or false?*
   a. Noah first sent the raven out of the ark to see if the waters were going down
   b. Three coats are warmer than one coat three times as thick
   c. The hind legs of a giraffe are as long as the front legs
2. *What is the difference between:*
   a. an oriel and a dormer window
   b. a clinker-built and a carvel-built boat
   c. a piebald and a skewbald horse
3. *It may take more than a second to find the second names of: John B. Priestley; Jerome K. Jerome; William S. Gilbert; Thomas S. Eliot*
4. *What are the phrases from which these "made-up" words are formed: Pluto; Fido; Asdic*
5. *Motel, tigon. What pairs of words "married" to produce these hybrids?*
6. *Can you give the right man his job in the following cases?*
   a. Darwin b. Old Moore c. Blondin
   A. Vaticinator B. Palaeontologist C. Funambulist
7. *Give another name for these flowers:*
   a. old man's beard b. love-lies-bleeding c. love-in-a-mist
   d. love-in-idleness e. codlins-and-cream

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taking

Indoor—

He told me that when sober he frequently lost umbrellas, but when drunk never. He made a special point of retaining his umbrella then in his hand; it became his chief concern in life. Once he got badly drunk at Maxim's. He just had sense enough to take a cab to the rooms of a mistress he had then. She received him and undressed him and put him to bed. But he would not "leave go" of his umbrella during the process. He passed it from hand to hand as she divested him of his coat, waistcoat and shirt, and he took it to bed. And he said: "She became very angry with that umbrella."

ARNOLD BENNETT, *Journal*, 10*th December* 1904

—and Outdoor Games

"Live for three weeks upon a pair of boots and a silk umbrella with an ivory handle!" exclaimed Mr. Pickwick in horror . . . It seems, however, that there are people who literally thrive on such a diet . . . As to the umbrella handle . . . there can be no two opinions; it makes superlative gnawing, at once soothing and stimulating. It is well placed for the purpose, being at just the right height from the floor for the man who is leaning forward to watch in an attitude of intent, concentrated suffering . . .

Whether or not such almost intolerable anxieties make for greater pleasure is a question which the spectator must decide for himself. He may resemble the small boy in the old *Punch* picture who, when asked if smoking does not make him feel sick, replies heroically, "Yes, but I like the feeling." Undoubtedly your true umbrella-biter does like it.

The Umbrella Biters,
from *The Times*, 6*th December* 1954

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cover . . .

Foiled—

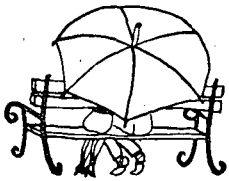
Courting. To-night sheets of rain, strong wind. I put on over-shoes and mackintosh to go to the corner of the street to the post. Several times lately about 10 p.m. I have noticed a couple that stand under the big tree at the corner next to the pillar-box, shielded by the tree-trunk from the lamplight. They stand motionless, with hands nearly meeting round each other's backs, tightly clasped. They were there to-night. The man was holding an umbrella over them. Can't see what sort of people they are. In the first place I don't like to intrude and in the second place the shade is so dark.

ARNOLD BENNETT, *Journal, 30th January* 1913

—and Furled

In public doorways on a rainy day
umbrellas bend, unbend,
and let themselves be dripped on, swayed,
unstable as a pigeon flock
that passers-by offend.
Some sidle a moment
and take unwilling flight;
others, folding, alight.

JEAN FARLEY, *Here and There*



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MARRIAGE BROKER

BY JOHN INGLIS HALL

Versatile, with a quick wit and sparkling conversation, John Inglis Hall is married to a French wife. He recently appeared on television telling his own stories. Puzzled the wartime censors by posting to America a poem about a horse and a cow, which they swooped upon as a message in code.

Was just off to Antibes when he sent us this tale about La Belle Victoria—that gay, naughty, attractive young woman whom Argosy fans will be delighted to meet again.

IT stood there glittering, silken-skinned—a white stallion, saddled, and groomed to such perfection that the busy, chattering morning crowd on the boulevard des 4e Zouaves in Casablanca stopped to stare. At its head was a tall Arab, scarcely less striking than the horse, dressed in a magnificent white *djellaba*, smiling, proud of himself, confident of his authority and prestige. They were waiting in the brilliant sunshine outside a low, arched doorway, showing off together.

It was a beautiful sight, and La Belle Victoria, Sancia Delmas's Arab servant, whom I had met returning from the *souk* with a great coloured basket of vegetables, fruit, and flowers, stopped with me to look at them. She could never resist a spectacle.

"Tiens," she said reflectively, looking hard at the man over the top of her veil, "it is indeed a beautiful horse, a king of horses . . ."

"The man is handsome, too, Victoria," I observed slyly, looking at the horse. It sidled and stamped and rolled its eyes. There was a little white arc of foam on its lips, such as a retreating wave leaves on the beach.

Victoria's eyes lit up for a moment with quick understanding, then she laughed outright. The man had noticed her and began talking gently to the horse, but with excitement in his voice.

"Oua-ha, favoured of God," he said. "They gaze at you, they admire you, and how you love to be admired! Oua-ha!"

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He nodded his head and caressed the stallion's neck, laughing and looking all the while at La Belle Victoria, who stared back at him.

"Who is he, Victoria?" I asked, for I was certain she knew him.

La Belle Victoria seemed to hear nothing for a moment, then exclaimed softly, as though talking to herself, "So they have returned! It is Mohammed, Monsieur le Docteur, the servant of Monsieur Blackford."

I detected both speculation and reminiscence in her voice and was about to question her further when a tall man with a slight stoop appeared at the doorway. He wore a white sun-helmet, perfectly cut jodhpurs, and a white shirt, open at the neck. My first impression of him was one of extreme physical authority. I remember thinking at once that he had all the grooming and style of his horse: that he looked male, predatory, instinctive as an animal. He walked with an extraordinary lightness of foot, and he was not young.

The two men exchanged greetings, the newcomer speaking Arabic with ease and an air of complete mastery, as though the language were his own.

"Razi is impatient, sidi," said the Arab. "See, he greets you! Like a woman, he awaits his master!" He gave Victoria a sidelong glance as he spoke.

They stood beside the horse for a moment, admiring it, then suddenly, as it shied away from him, with a lightning movement, Blackford vaulted straight into the saddle, caught the reins from Mohammed, and took charge. It was exquisitely done—a beautiful athletic feat. The horse fought him for a full minute. He fought back, almost motionless except for his arms and hands, smiling to himself, as though he were controlling it by virtue of some deep understanding of all morning playfulness. Man and beast seemed determined to show their quality together.

The crowd looked on admiringly, and Mohammed basked for a moment in the glory of his charges. Finally, horse and rider came to terms, and as they moved off, the stallion, head tossing, eyes rolling, screamed a sudden, passionate, high challenge. Somewhere, streets away, a mare answered . . .

As we walked back to Sancia's studio, La Belle Victoria was unusually silent. She remained a few steps behind me, as though to prevent herself from communicating her thoughts to me through her expressive dark eyes.

Sancia met us at the door of the studio, with Roberto, her pet monkey, perched on her shoulder.

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"They have just rung from the airfield, Jean," she announced. "You take off this afternoon. Carron is expecting you at Ain El Mekhta this evening. I envy you!"

La Belle Victoria seemed deliberately to remain behind me as I answered. She did not go to the kitchen at once with her vegetables.

"You'd better come with me," I said to Sancia.

She shook her head. "I can't. The aircraft has room for only one passenger. It's a pity!"

She smiled and took my hand. "There's just time for lunch," she continued. "I've packed your things. Run along and get ready."

Upstairs in my room, as I changed, I found myself thinking of the horse, of Mohammed—and of Noel Blackford. He was one of the many subjects to which Sancia and I never referred. I had known him, until that morning, only by reputation and hearsay, and by a head that Sancia had done of him several years before, and still kept in her own portrait-gallery in the studio.

It was an inscrutable, powerful face, thin and spare, with eyes set so deep that they seemed to peer out at the world from two dark caves. The nose was pointed, rather large: below it, thin, finely shaped lips and a deeply cleft chin. As I dressed, I found myself wishing gradually, almost subconsciously, that I was not going that day to Ain El Mekhta . . .

Returning to the studio ten minutes later, I looked down from the gallery round which were the bedrooms. Sancia had lifted the head of Noel Blackford from its place on the shelf, and was examining it while La Belle Victoria laid the table for lunch. She looked up at me as I came down the stairs, and smiled.

"Victoria tells me that one of her old flames is in town," she said obliquely.

I nodded my head. It was unwise to approach any delicate matter except by the route chosen by Sancia. "Yes," I said. "Victoria and I saw a horse, a white stallion, on the boulevard. It was a beautiful horse, the king of horses . . ."

I quoted Victoria's own words, and they both laughed.

"It's a good thing you will not be here for a few days," said Sancia succinctly. "We shall not see much of Victoria, I fancy."

She laughed again, this time, I thought, a shade uneasily. She had made a mistake, but recovered herself a second later. "I think I shall go to Fez to stay with the Chanzys, while you are away," she said.

"Yes, Sancia," I said evenly. "Perhaps you had better."

It was rather a silent lunch, with La Belle Victoria very attentive,

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very observant, very tactful, and a thought too kind to me. Sancia and I normally accepted silence as easily as we accepted talk, but this time we floundered in dumb unease. Then at the end of the meal, she got up and went over to the table on which the head of Noel Blackford was standing. Even then she did not speak to me directly. She picked up Roberto, transferred him to her shoulder, and addressed her remarks to him. It was a habit she shared with Victoria.

"A good head, Roberto," she said, turning her face towards him, "a strong face, but with all that strength, that brilliance, faithless—so faithless that even I would have no more to do with him. It is quite, quite finished."

Roberto appeared to listen attentively, coughed, and mumbled an incomprehensible monkey remark.

"Roberto, of course, knew him well," she continued, then added, "I once thought this the best head I ever did. I don't now. I missed all the things that I came to hate in him only after I had done it."

The thought ran through my mind: *The lady doth protest too much.* Was it then so necessary to reassure me? It seemed the better part to say nothing, so I remained silent. Sancia waited for a moment to see whether I would make a false move, then smiled and came over and kissed me. She was warm and affectionate, almost admiring.

"Good, Jean," she said. "I believe you feel for me what I once felt for him." It was the first direct admission she ever made to me about Noel Blackford.

She went from the studio into the little courtyard outside, to start the car. As the front door closed behind her, Victoria entered the studio.

"Au revoir, Victoria," I said. "Fortunate Mohammed . . ."

She nodded her head vigorously. "Yes," she said excitedly. "Lucky, lucky Mohammed, and for me, too—ah-h-h-h! . . ."

Her lips quivered as she cried out, then she closed her eyes, as though in physical ecstasy. Opening them after a few seconds, she said: "Au revoir, Monsieur le Docteur! I shall look after Madame Sancia while you are away, you can be sure."

"In Fez?" queried Sancia, returning.

"No, in Casablanca," said Victoria, for a moment unwary.

I looked from one face to the other—from the golden brown to the white, from the white to the golden brown—but they exchanged no sign that I could understand. At last Sancia took me by the arm. "Come, Jean," she said with a little sigh. "They will be waiting for you at the airfield."

We walked out into the yard, to where Sancia's royal blue

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sports Bugatti stood, purposefully thundering and panting to itself, like some powerful, stormy-tempered little animal. The air was leaden under the fierce midday sun which cast hard shadows on the dusty cobble-stones. A starved cat slept in a ragged ball beside the door in the shade of the house. Victoria followed us out with my small bag, and handed it in to me, then ran to the open gate to signal us out into the street. Sancia let in the clutch and we moved slowly forward. I saw Victoria wave to us and waved back mechanically.

Sancia drove very slowly through the boulevards. She could never resist showing herself off to the crowds sitting at the café terraces. Men watched her as we went by. She was remarkable enough, with her shining blonde hair, her complete composure, her beauty, and her remoteness. Sometimes, she looked at me out of the corner of her eye to see if I was enjoying her as much as she was enjoying herself, but on this journey I was out of touch with her. Just before we reached the entrance to Cazes airfield, she took a hand from the wheel and laid it on my thigh.

"You'll be back in a week," she said decisively. "And I shall go to Fez."

We drove to the main hangars where, among the Dakotas and Constellations, a little Henriot biplane sat like a dove among pterodactyls. As we drew up, the heat dropped on us like a weight. Henri Duvivier, who was to pilot me to Ain El Mekhta, came over and kissed Sancia's hand, then helped her out of her seat. He was a heavy, clumsy man, kind, but celebrated for his tactlessness, a wonderful pilot who knew the Atlas country as though it had been conceived in his mind.

"Ma petite Sancia," he said, "what a pity you can't come with us! They tell me that Noel is back in Casa? Is it true?"

Without glancing at me, Sancia replied, casually enough, "I believe so, Henri. Victoria is mad with joy. His Mohammed was always her *grand béguin*."

"Ah yes, I remember," he said. "Well, Jean, shall we start? Marrakesh first, refuel, then straight over the Atlas, the Sus, then Ain El Mekhta, isn't it? In and out among the peaks. This old lady won't climb to more than twelve thousand feet you know."

Sancia helped me on with my parachute harness, and stood close to me while Duvivier warmed up his engine. Then she kissed me with the beautiful, impersonal coolness which she used on public occasions, first on one cheek, then on the other. I could smell her perfume.

"My love to Claude Carron at Ain El Mekhta," she said, "and tell him to come and see us when he takes his leave. A bientôt!"

I kissed her on the forehead and got in beside Duvivier. He

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waved to her, then I waved, and we taxied to the runway. Five minutes later, the little aircraft had pushed the earth away from underneath it and we were in the freedom of the upper air. Banking a little, we turned onto our course for Marrakesh and I looked back towards the hangars, half a mile away. The blue car had gone already. Then, quite suddenly, I picked it up again. It had stopped outside the airfield gate, and beside it I could distinguish a man in white, standing at the head of a white horse . . .

" A perfect day for flying."

I heard Duvivier's voice raised above the roar of the engine, and was compelled to look round. " Perfect," I heard myself shout in reply.

We flew low over the undulating plain of El Mogreb, green and red and brown, intersected by roads and tracks, above lone villages, some white, some red, surrounded with hillocks striped with green vines. There were cars on the roads, trailing long streamers of dust, and occasionally trudging, swaying camel trains, scared for a moment by our passing bird-shadow.

I watched for the rivers, first the thin, shining thread of the Oum Er Rbia, then the Oued Tensift to the north of Marrakesh. I kept my mind on anything that would distract me from black thoughts. I was counting the minutes until I could get to a telephone to ring the Chanzys, to see whether Sancia had rung to tell them that she was coming to Fez.

We circled the airfield of Marrakesh, then touched down, neatly as a bird, on the main runway, and taxied over to the hangars.

" I'll ring Fez while you are refuelling," I said to Henri. " I want to give a message to the Chanzys for Sancia. She's staying with them while I am away. I left some instruments behind at the hospital last week."

Duvivier grinned and patted me on the back like a friendly bear.

" Good," he said kindly. " I'm glad she's going to Fez. I had an idea she might be staying in Casa to see Noel. You know him, of course? "

Five minutes later, I was talking to Georges Chanzy. His voice crackled over the line, sharp and clear.

" No, she hasn't rung . . . No, mon vieux, not yet . . . Yes, I'll certainly tell her if she does . . . Ah, wait a minute, I see Renée signalling to me like a madwoman. One minute . . ."

There was a short silence. I imagined Georges standing by the window of his study, looking out into the shade of his tropical

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garden, one of the loveliest in Fez, and covering the mouthpiece of the phone with his hand.

"Eh bien, Jean," he continued after a moment. "I made a mistake!" He spoke too cheerfully, like one who lies. "Renée tells me that Sancia rang a quarter of an hour ago while I was out. She is flying up tomorrow morning at eight o'clock . . . Yes, I'll give her your message. Don't forget to remember us to Claude Carron at El Mekhta . . . Au revoir!"

I hung up the receiver thoughtfully. It was an alibi. *Renée is signalling to me like a madwoman*—obviously a warning, followed by a hurried explanation. It did not occur to me that it might have been the strict truth.

We took off again, and it was a relief to be isolated, away from the world. The city fell back behind us, and soon the High Atlas rose in wild red chaos, peak behind peak behind peak. There was still snow on the highest of them. We reached the foothills, and Henri began to climb in slow, weary spirals, up and up and up.

I watched the altimeter mark one, two, three, then three thousand five hundred metres, until we were level with the tops of some of the peaks. A few white clouds drifted above us in an intense blue sky. For a little while I lost myself in the world of the eagle.

Henri was following the Atlas mountain route to the Col of Tizi N'Test. He pointed out the great peaks, Djebel Erdouz and Djebel Tichka. With our eleven thousand feet of altitude, we twisted and turned crazily in and out among the lower ones. Sometimes an oasis appeared below us like a streak of green gold in a red valley, but the terraced, rose-red, iron-red hills, spotted with scrub and thorn bushes, were utterly, relievingly, without human life.

As the sun westered, the deep purple shadows of early evening began to appear. At last we were over the Atlas, and the roaring in my ears told me that we were losing height. The green of the upper Sus appeared, and beyond it the Anti-Atlas, lower and less majestic, but no less wild. Soon we picked up the long ridge of the Djebel Bani, then, all at once, we could see Ain El Mekhta.

The post of Ain El Mekhta lies between two broken ridges of the Bani. It has a spectacular red fort, perched on a rocky hill, called El Jorf. Beside it you can pick out the rolled airstrip by its slightly lighter colour. Beyond, to the west, is an oasis of many thousand palm trees. As we swooped and circled round the fort, suddenly Henri noticed a lone horseman, half concealed among the trees. He pointed him out to me.

"Carron!" he exclaimed. "Another great horseman!"

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Another . . . Who else did he mean? Noel Blackford. It pulled me back roughly into the inhabited world.

As we touched down and taxied over the bumpy, uneven strip, a hundred and fifty yelling horsemen in their flowing *djellabas* galloped out of the oasis, rifle in hand, racing towards us at top speed. In a moment we were surrounded, in a cloud of dust. They closed in and at an order from Carron, the men rose in their saddles with wild shouts, pulled their horses up onto their haunches, and fired a welcoming volley. It was Carron's greeting to old friends.

He rode forward and welcomed us from the saddle, then jumped down lightly and walked over to us, leading his horse, while his men rode away, chattering delightedly.

The first thing he said after the exchange of greetings was, "I hear Noel Blackford is back in Casa. I wonder why? They said that he was dying in London, and would never return to El Mogreb . . ."

"How did you know?" asked Duvivier.

"They told me in the radio message announcing Jean's visit," he replied. "How do you feel, Jean, with your principal rival back in the field?"

I shrugged my shoulders and tried a smile. It must have been pretty wan. "Just as I always have," I said, perhaps with a shade more truth than I intended. "Sancia has gone to Fez to the Chanzys while I am away. I spoke to them from Marrakesh."

"Tant mieux," said Carron. "Noel is a man with a curious power, even over people who don't like him—and they are many. Did you know him? I forget."

I shook my head. "No, I only saw him once—this morning."

Carron suddenly spoke eagerly, "How did he look?"

"Young," I said. "Remarkable."

"And he's sixty, isn't he, Henri?"

"About."

We walked silently towards the fort over the broken, stony sand. It gave off an intense dry heat, though the evening wind had risen, and around us it was cold.

Normally, the great pleasure of visiting the deserts of the south is the sudden change in the value of time. The haste of the city becomes ridiculous in places where it takes an epoch for anything perceptible to occur. Claude Carron had adjusted himself to this state of affairs so perfectly that the very slowness of his gait maddened one—until the moment when one gave in and did likewise. He always spent his first half-hour repeating at intervals, "Don't hurry. Remember, you are going nowhere."

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Claude Carron had been twenty years in the desert and now wished for nothing better than to remain there. He had a deep and acute philosophy. Most men in the desert posts develop their different techniques to combat boredom and the sense of awe and emptiness. Those who succeed perfectly diffuse an aura of calm that is impressive, like the aura of greatness. It may even make them great. Carron was one of these.

His strangest toy was his riding-school. As a very young man, he had been in the international show-jumping class. Now, in mid Sahara, he had built a complete ring and course for the haute école, even down to the little two-tier row of tribunes alongside for spectators. There, he schooled his horsemen until they were the finest trick riders in the south.

Generally, for me, Carron was a perfect companion and a perfect host, but this time, nothing was right, because we came bearing confirmation of news, news of the return of Noel Blackford. It was the main subject of conversation.

At the end of our three-days' stay at Ain El Mekhta I knew more about Noel Blackford than I had ever known, and the more I knew, the more I wanted to return to Casablanca immediately. I was not able to adopt the slow, timeless gait of Carron in his Sahara. I was for ever hurrying to nowhere. Perhaps not entirely to nowhere, however. I got my work done quicker. In my journeys to the desert, my job was to investigate cases of rare diseases. I would spend a few days studying and treating my patients, and a few days helping with general medicine. This time, by the third evening, I had finished and was eager to go.

It had been decided that we should fly home the next morning, and we were dining together, the three of us, Claude Carron, Henri Duvivier, and I, with Lucien Jeffre, the Commander of the neighbouring post of Sidi Bou N'Fis.

We were smoking in our long chairs, and drinking coffee. The sun was setting in a blaze of red and gold and mauve and purple. Out of the windows of the Fort of El Jorf we watched the oasis darken from olive-green to black. The immense loneliness of the desert night became imminent outside our small illuminated circle. Lucien was talking about Noel.

"They say he is either going to sell up completely and leave Morocco, or retire with some woman to his property at Founti in Agadir. He must be rich. He made more money out of mineral and land concessions here over the last thirty years than anyone I know." He chuckled. "I fancy they'd be glad to see him go in Rabat, though! He's English, and English influence in Morocco has always been stronger than we like to admit."

"Where did you hear this?" asked Carron.

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" It's being said in the *souk* at Agadir—and they know. He was always an intimate of the Sus Caids. There's something of the magician in him—with people. He can be as Arab as the Arabs, as Jewish as the Jews, as French as the French—and he's an Englishman. As for women, saving your presence, Jean—" he smiled at me quietly—" wherever you go in this country, you find women who talk of him as though he were still their lover. He excites fanatical jealousies and extraordinary loyalties. For me, I shall be sad if he goes. I can agree or disagree, like or dislike, but there are few people in the world larger than life-size and your Noel Blackford is one.

He fell silent. Then, suddenly, apropos of nothing, Carron said to me," Jean, why don't you stop hurrying and behave sensibly? Stay for a few more days. We could hunt a bit, and I could put you through the school."

I shook my head. I felt sure now that something too critical was happening on the other side of the Atlas, in Casablanca, something even more decisive for me than I had feared earlier.

Henri Duvivier said helpfully, " Don't worry about me, Jean —three days means nothing to me. Let the Chanzys enjoy Sancia in Fez. She hardly ever goes there since Noel left Morocco."

But my mind was made up. Next morning as we started out together to the airstrip, Carron and Jeffre and I, to join Henri who had been tinkering with his engine since the early morning, Carron took me by the arm.

" Eh bien, mon vieux, good luck! " he said. " You know you are always welcome here," he added. " Come and hunt and ride and watch the stars, and listen to the sand. Stay as long as you like."

It was kind of him. " I'll come down with Sancia, later in the year," I said, taking him by the hand.

" Do," he said. " Au revoir, then."

We shook hands all round. Lucien Jeffre said, " If you see Noel say I'd like to see him again, before he leaves us—if he leaves us. You know, there aren't many men, at the end, one really regrets seeing for the last time. He's one of them. Don't forget."

A few minutes later, we took off, climbing steeply over the oasis, then circling the airstrip. Duvivier climbed to about a thousand feet, in great broad sweeps, and we watched the two men walk towards El Jorf, talking together, almost certainly, I reflected, about Noel Blackford.

Then we straightened out and Henri pushed the stick forward

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as we dived on the fort. For a moment, there was only the exhilaration of speed as the hill rushed up at us. We saw Carron's servants in their white *djellabas*, and Carron and Jeffre, now halfway up the hill, waving to us then we pulled out of the dive. I felt the pressure of the quick climb on the top of my head, and in a moment the fort was behind us again.

We turned towards the Atlas and the long way home. We got in late in the afternoon, having refuelled at Agadir, and followed the coastline up to Casablanca.

On the way from the aerodrome I was childishly anxious. Paying off my taxi at the corner of the place de France, I went, deceitfully, on foot, down the boulevard to the gate of Sancia's yard, pushed it open rather more quietly than was perhaps honourable, and walked with too light a step to the door of the studio.

La Belle Victoria saw me through the window, waved both hands in the air, and gave me her most dazzling smile. The window was open.

"Monsieur le Docteur," she cried, "you already!"

"Yes," I said. "There wasn't much to do at El Mekhta after all, so I decided I might as well come back." I looked for signs of uneasiness in her behaviour. There were none, but I knew she was a superb actress.

"Forgive me," she said. "I will open the door for you in one minute, but you see, I am not altogether dressed—my *seroual*!" She looked at me, enchantingly, wickedly, over her shoulder, laughing.

"And Mohammed?" I asked.

She shook her head. "Is not here . . ." she said, "now . . ."

I watched her through the window. She ran to the kitchen for a moment, then returned, and opened the door.

"Voilà!" she exclaimed, displaying herself, "my clean *seroual*."

I entered the studio. A faint, acrid smell hung in the air: French tobacco—not Sancia's American cigarettes. Noel's? Victoria watched me silently; then, head on one side, she warned me, "Mohammed smokes Gauloises, also, Monsieur Jean . . ." She was watching me, to the very movements of my nostrils.

"And Madame Sancia," I asked, "she is in Fez?"

Victoria looked me straight in the eyes for a moment, calculating with female cunning what was going on in my mind Very slowly she shook her head.

"No, Monsieur Jean," she said decisively. Then, for the first time since I had known her, she permitted herself a familiar

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gesture towards me. She put out her hand, and laid it very gently on my arm.

" Monsieur le Docteur," she said, " you will be tired. Would it not perhaps be a good thing if you went upstairs and had a bath? I need a moment to put a few things in order . . ."

I opened my mouth, a decisive, bitter question on the tip of my tongue, but when it came to speaking, I found it hard to know just what I should say, except " Where is Madame, then? " and that I already knew, or thought I knew.

I sighed. At least Victoria would have a logical reason for the advice she had given, I reflected. " All right, Victoria," I said. " I'll have a bath, then. I'll be half an hour."

She looked at me and smiled. " Thank you," she said.

I went upstairs to the little white-tiled bathroom, turned on both taps to the full, and began to peel off my clothes. The room was full of steam and the noise of running water, and I kept the door closed so that I could not hear Victoria at the telephone . . .

By the time I had changed after my bath, Sancia had returned. I greeted her awkwardly from the gallery above the studio. She was very thoughtful, and for the first time since I had known her, I sensed that she was not sure of herself.

" Hullo," she said. " Back so soon? "

There was quite a long pause. She was waiting for me to help her by speaking, but I decided that this must be entirely her own explanation.

" Victoria has told you that I didn't go to Fez . . ." She shrugged her shoulders. " Couldn't you come down into the studio? " she asked. " We're not really separated that much, cross my heart."

With one finger she executed the familiar nursery gesture, drawing a cross over her left breast.

" —Unless you want us to be," she added.

I ran down the stairs two at a time, but she stopped me with her hand before I reached her.

" Wait," she said, then paused for a moment. " Let me tell you about it. He came back for me—that's all. It was quite settled in his mind, marriage, the house at Founti, retirement. If you'd asked me the morning you left for Ain El Mekhta what I was going to do—and the question was written all over you—I didn't know. Well, I held firm, that's all. But he remains the most brilliant, the most ruthless, the most calculating, the most stimulating physical phenomenon I ever knew. But even at nearly sixty—still faithless, still fascinating, fascinated by himself—and irresistibly fascinating to others . . ."

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She took me by the hands. "Look at me, Jean," she said, simply. "How could he? Never again!"

I suppose I looked hurt, because she stepped forward, close to me, and kissed me on the mouth.

"Ah Jean," she said softly. "I never did such work as I have done since I knew you, never in my life! With him, I was possessed, but torn—torn to pieces, destroyed."

For me, that had to be enough. It was much, very much.

A few minutes later, Victoria put her head round the kitchen door, then came into the room. She was radiant, triumphant.

"You see, Monsieur Jean," she said. "I was right. The bath did you good."

She went back to the kitchen and came out a moment later with an ice-bucket with a bottle of champagne in it, and set it down on the table.

Sancia turned away from me and looked at her. "Victoria," she said, "do you know that you are a rich woman? Monsieur Noel told me so an hour ago. He has given you a dowry—his house at Founti. If you marry Mohammed."

La Belle Victoria gasped and raised a hand to her mouth, biting into the flesh with her white teeth. "Founti!" she gasped, "the house at Founti!"

Tears ran down her face.

"Madame Sancia," she cried. "No, no—not Mohammed. I couldn't! I love him!"

She fled to the kitchen, still crying. When she returned, Victoria was herself again.

"No, Madame Sancia," she said, and she was laughing now, with lips and eyes and heart and soul. "I love him, but it wouldn't be fair! It wouldn't be fair . . . with you still free!"

She paused for breath, then looked at us both, first at one, then at the other.

"But it might be fair," she continued slyly, "if you married Monsieur Jean . . ."

"Victoria, the marriage broker!" I cried, then turned to Sancia. "Do you accept this lady's proposition? Quick, an answer!"

Sancia nodded her head slowly. "I couldn't bear her to lose Founti," she said. "Besides, it might work."

* * *

A CATCH IN IT?

One man's fish is another man's poisson.

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LOVE IS A GIMMICK

BY PAUL GALLICO

I WENT back today and looked at a diary I wrote thirty years ago and put away in the bottom of an old theatrical trunk. It was the account of the end of The Great Armando.

And I got out something else too, and looked at it again for the first time since it had come into my hands so long ago. It was a canvas strait jacket with leather straps, the metal buckles rusted from contact with the waters of the Detroit River.

Still sewn into the sleeves was the gimmick, that simple and devilish device of a mean and murderous man, which, as I wrote in my diary back in 1925, killed The Great Armando as surely as a bullet in the brain or a knife stuck in his heart. Only we never found his body afterwards.

The Great Armando was a farm boy from Perrysville, Ohio, whose real name was Joe Ferris. I was his partner for five years and loved him like a brother. He was a queer moody fellow; his father was American and his mother Polish. He was the strongest man I ever knew, particularly in his fingers, hands, and wrists.

He wasn't even a big guy, being no more than five foot ten, and stocky, with shoulders and chest like a barrel.

And I guess the most important thing in the world to The Great Armando was the legend we'd built up about his escapes. He boasted that there wasn't a prison cell, manacle, lock, or restraint that could hold him.

And it was true, in a way. He was the greatest showman I ever knew, with piercing black eyes, and a big shock of black hair which he wore long for effect. In public he talked like a dago with some kind of phoney accent he'd picked up from a Mexican knife-thrower. But in private with me, he was as American as chewing-gum.

When he was a kid a carnival came through Perrysville and he ran away with it from his old man's farm. He picked up everything good and bad a kid can learn around a carnival, but

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when he met an Australian who taught him to escape from knotted ropes, he found his life's work.

Thereafter he concentrated on escapes and worked up a fair living with an act devoted to getting out of strait jackets, handcuffs, ropes, and so on.

But he didn't become The Great Armando and hit the big money until I joined up with him in 1920 after the war.

If that seems like blowing my own trumpet, Joe Ferris would have been the first to back me up. It just happened that I had what he needed to take him out of the class of the mediocre performers barn-storming the country with cheap carnivals, and put him in the ranks of the world's great illusionists whose names will never be forgotten—like Robert-Houdin, Maskelyne, Hermann the Great, Thurston, Harry Kellar, and Harry Houdini.

My name is Carl Hegemeyer, master mechanic and locksmith. My father came over from Germany in 1888. He taught me the accumulated knowledge of eight generations of locksmiths, which could be summed up in the sentence—anything that can be locked can likewise be opened provided you have the right key or instrument.

But I had another accomplishment that made me indispensable to the myth of The Great Armando. I could look at a key, and several hours later duplicate it from memory. When we travelled around, I had the finest little portable power-driven metal lathe and key-cutter with me. I could plug it into any hotel room or, in emergencies, run it off the battery in our car.

An hour or so after a preliminary conference on any escape challenge at which I saw the key that was used to lock the device, Armando would have a duplicate. Slipping it to him was easy, and concealing it was no problem for a man with his training in sleight-of-hand.

There's no such thing as magic. You know that. You've watched a lot of magic shows where, seen from the front of the house, the magician performs the apparently impossible. Well, it not only seems impossible; it is. There's a gaff to everything.

Gaff is the carnival word for the gimmick, the trick, the concealed device, the common-sense explanation of how it is done. And usually the gaff is something so simple you don't want to believe it.

You'd see The Great Armando buried handcuffed in a stone sarcophagus, and three minutes later he'd be out of it, taking his bow. Common sense would tell you he couldn't do it unless he had superhuman powers, or assistance. But the kind of showmanship he'd give you would make you want to believe in the superhuman powers. That's what you paid your money for.

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Yet in nine cases out of ten he had assistance. I provided it. With my help he escaped from a sealed subterranean vault, a safe-deposit in the Treasury, a 4,000-year-old Greek stone coffin, the punishment cell at Alcatraz gaol, and countless types of manacles and restraining jackets.

But don't forget, he had just what it takes—and more. Even if you know the gimmicks it needs guts to let them lace you into a strait jacket, stuff you into a government mailbag, padlock it, nail you into a packing-case bound with rope, and drop you into an icy river in midwinter.

The only one to come up to The Great Armando was Houdini; everything Houdini did, Armando could do. Houdini did the river escape trick, only he used handcuffs that he could get out of in ten seconds. Nobody but Armando dared to do it wearing the strait jacket and letting an expert truss him up.

Yet, as I wrote in my diary, the strait jacket finished him—leastways, the gimmick in it. And a woman put it there. The only woman he ever loved.

He was a queer duck, was Joe Ferris. Nobody ever knew him or got close to him, not even me, and I was his trusted partner. I suppose that was the Polish in him. Often he was moody and suspicious. He kept his money locked away in cash in safe-deposit boxes under different names that I never even knew. He thought only of his reputation and the myth of The Great Armando. He said to me, "Remember this: whatever happens, The Great Armando never fails."

Yet he was no fool either and knew the risks he was running. He once told me, "The first time I get a real bad scare, I'll quit, and nobody'll ever hear of The Great Armando again. But up to now I haven't seen anything we can't beat."

But that was before we met up with Sheriff Jules Massin of Ossawo County, in the tough River Rouge section of Detroit, where we were doing the water escape as preliminary publicity to Armando's appearance at the Michigan Palace Theatre in Detroit. The sheriff had taken up our challenge to lace Armando into a strait jacket from which he could not escape.

On the face of it, it was routine. There was no strait jacket made that Armando couldn't get out of in less than a minute. But we never took chances. It was a condition that Armando guaranteed to get out of any restraining device provided he could inspect it first. The padlock on the mail sack had to be closed and opened in our presence. This gave me the necessary dekko at the key. The packing-case had to go on exhibition in the foyer before and after the stunt. That's when we gaffed it.

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We thought we had every angle covered. But we had never reckoned on coming up against a man with murder in his heart.

There was a crowd in the sheriff's office when we went there to inspect the restraints and set up the stunt. There were deputies, detectives, police, reporters, and photographers. The sheriff's wife was there, too. His office was on the ground floor of his home.

At first I didn't notice her. She had a scarf bound round her head, European style. She had pale cheeks and prominent grey-green eyes that seemed absolutely devoid of expression. They did not even flicker when the sheriff, noticing her in the forefront of those crowding around his desk, snarled, "What the hell you doin' here, Tina? Can't you see I'm busy?"

She was submissive to his abuse, every line of her body proclaimed her to be cowed and hopeless. Yet she did not go, and soon other matters claimed the sheriff's attention.

The sheriff was a mean man. Mean, dirty, and dangerous. He wasn't a copper for nothing. He liked it. We meet all kinds in our racket from plain smart alecks who think it is fun to put something over on a performer, to cops and gaolers who don't like to see you put anything across them. But we'd never run up against a guy nursing murder in his heart, because he knew he could get away with it. Armando always signed a release.

That was the sheriff. I knew him for a killer, a killer on the right side of the law, from the moment I walked into his office. He was over six feet tall, fat, burly, and dirty. His clothes were dirty, his skin, his finger-nails, and his teeth. His breath was bad. In a belt holster he wore a fancy gun, silver-and-ivory-handled. You could see he loved the power it gave him.

Massin threw a strait jacket onto his desk and sneered, "Anything wrong with that?"

It was an ordinary violence-restraint jacket with straps and buckles, the easiest type for Armando, since the canvas was not unusually thick. No matter how tightly he was strapped down, Armando, by swelling his muscles, could always reserve enough slack to get his arms over his head. Then he opened the buckles *through* the canvas. I told you he had the most powerful fingers in the world. In that direction he was superhuman. That's why he was called great. I picked up the jacket to show Armando. But he wasn't looking.

Something strange had happened. He was staring instead at Tina Massin, and on his face was an expression such as I had never seen there before.

I had to catch my breath. Her headscarf had fallen back upon her neck, revealing hair so ash-blonde it was almost white, and

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the perfect oval of her face. She looked like the pale, imprisoned princess in the book of Grimm's fairy-tales I had when I was a kid. The impression she made upon me at that moment was one I would never forget. Have you ever known the sensation of seeing someone for the first time and in that moment knowing their life story almost as though you had read it in a book?

She was of foreign extraction, maybe Polish or Finnish. I guessed she had been taken into the sheriff's establishment as household drudge from some institution. No doubt she had first been abused, and later married, because it was more convenient to own a wife than a servant. There are some women who fall hopeless, submissive captives to the most appalling men. Such a one was Tina Massin.

They were caught up in one another's eyes, these two utterly different and contrasting strangers—the black-haired showman with his piercing glance, and the pale girl with the silken, thick hair, and eyes that were for the first time alive and filled with a kind of pleading. At any moment it would become obvious that two people had found one another, had fallen in love, and were attempting to communicate.

I created a diversion by tossing the jacket back onto the desk. "That's O.K.," I said.

The sheriff sniggered unpleasantly. "It's the way I strap 'em into it," he said. I was satisfied to let Armando deal with that.

The post-office inspector produced the mailbag. I bent over to examine the thickness, fittings, and padlock. I had a dozen keys that would open it. Armando would have two of them concealed on his person attached to a fine wire. Once out of the strait jacket, a matter of sixty seconds, he would push out the key and manipulate it, again through the material of the sack.

It was O.K. Nevertheless, I made them open and shut the lock several times to make sure it hadn't been fouled with shot or sand. Mrs. Massin dropped her handkerchief. Armando stooped to pick it up—as did she. Their fingers touched for an instant. I was still leaning over, examining the mailbag.

I heard her whisper to him, "For heaven's sake, don't do it . . ."

The time set for the trial was ten the next morning, at the Western and Lakes railway pier, where there was a big travelling crane. The document releasing the sheriff's office and Detroit Police from all responsibility was produced, and the photographers jostled for position. Somebody handed Armando a pen.

Mrs. Massin made a slight gesture with her hand. Their eyes met once more. She licked dry lips and, almost imperceptibly, shook her head.

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The sheriff missed the byplay, but sniggered again. "Going to welsh?" he asked, and then, addressing everyone in general, said, "I say all dagoes are yellow."

Joe Ferris flourished the pen dramatically. "Armando he nevaire welsh," he said, and signed. Tina Massin's eyes were extinguished. All the life went from her. She was hopeless, despairing, submissive. She turned and went out of the room.

I went to see Harry Hopp, an old reporter friend on the local daily. I told you we never left anything to chance. I didn't like the set-up at all. I asked, "What's the lowdown on your fragrant sheriff of Ossawo County?"

Hopp said, "Can't tell you anything good about him. But as you're asking, he hates carnivals and the circus crowd. They can't get any kind of a deal in his county. You better watch out for that guy."

"Yes," I said, "I see that. But why?"

"Spite," he replied. "There was a carnival through here five or six years ago really loaded up with illicit gambling rackets. They shelled out plenty to the sheriff to operate, but when he came back again for a second hand-out, they beat him up and threw him out. Maybe your friend Armando was with them and saw it happen. The sheriff's down on anything connected with travelling shows."

That night I said to Armando, "Listen, Joe. Were you ever with a show that beat up a sheriff around here before you started in with me?"

He reflected and then said slowly, "So that's where I know him from. When he tried to get something out of me, I went for him and that started it."

I said, "I don't like it. He's got it in for you. Let's call the show off this time. We can put it on in Cleveland next week instead."

He looked at me as if I were out of my mind, and asked, "Have we thought of everything?"

I went back over things in my mind. There was nothing that could happen that we hadn't thought of. "Yes," I said.

"O.K.," he said. "We go right ahead. We can't afford to back out."

But I was wrong. There was something I hadn't thought of, something so simple and elementary as a means of destroying Armando that it never dawned on me until it was too late.

The day of the test was damp, cold, and sunless. There were chunks of ice floating in the river. In spite of the raw, blustery

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weather, the pier and several adjoining docks were black with people. We'd had big advance publicity for this show . . .

The stunt was routine and we'd done it a dozen times before. The secret was this: as soon as they started to nail the cover onto the box, Armando would start working his way out of the strait jacket and the mailbag, while I'd play for time, and suggest putting in more nails or tying the rope tighter, until I got a signal from Armando that he was out of the strappings.

The crate had been gimmicked by us the night before with a concealed sliding panel in one side. Fifteen seconds after the box disappeared beneath the surface he'd be out of it.

It was as simple as that—like all stage illusions—but it was the way Armando did it that made it look so good. It is a part of the showmanship in that kind of act that when you really think a guy is in danger he's as safe as he'd be at home in bed.

The real deadly stuff doesn't show—like staying under in freezing water, holding your breath for more than three minutes, and then coming up amidst ice floes, or risking being carried away under the ice by the current. He had a right to call himself Armando the Great and to be proud of his reputation.

When Armando and I arrived, there was a big bunch of reporters, including Harry Hopp, and a horde of photographers and newsreel cameramen.

Captain Harry Stevens of the river police was giving directions to a police-launch that was to pick Armando up, if and when he appeared. He was not too pleased at being used for a publicity stunt and greeted us sourly. He said, " O.K., O.K., let's get going. You fellows signed a release, didn't you? "

Sheriff Massin, wearing a big sheepskin-lined coat, said, " Yup. Got it right here."

Armando slipped out of his cloak. Underneath he was wearing trousers and sweatshirt of light, warm wool, and canvas shoes. The sheriff stepped over with the strait jacket, a nasty, self-satisfied smile on his face. Tina Massin was there in the front row. She wasn't pretty any more. Her face was tearstained and filled with fear. Her eyes were fixed upon the jacket.

I spotted something about the sleeves that had not been there the day before. My stomach started to sink. I said, " Here, wait a minute. Let me see that jacket. It's been gimmicked."

The sheriff said, " They're just playing for time," but handed it over.

I turned out the sleeves. Inside, to the canvas lining had been sewn ten finger-grips of plaited strips of coloured straw. You've seen them in any trick shop, or child's magic set.

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Once they are slipped over a finger, the harder you pull the more tightly they grip. A device also used commercially for hoisting, there is no possible way of tearing loose from it. The secret of escape is to push against the grips. The plaits then contract and enlarge so that the finger can be removed.

But fastened inside the long, narrow sleeve of the jacket there was no leverage to enable him to push. And, deprived of the use of his fingers, The Great Armando was as good as drowned.

Armando's eyes narrowed when he saw the deadly trap, and the sweat beads formed on his upper lip and under his eyes. It was the first time I ever saw Joe Ferris afraid. I said, "What the hell is this? Those things weren't in there yesterday when we inspected the jacket."

Massin sniggered. "Well, they're in there now."

Tina Massin seemed about to faint. I had a picture of her sitting up all night with the sheriff standing over her, sewing in those terrible devices designed to kill a helpless man.

Captain Stevens came over, took the strait jacket, and looked at it and the innocent-seeming toy finger-grips plaited in reds, yellows, greens, and purples.

"What's the idea, Sheriff?" he asked.

Massin bustled truculently and replied loudly so that all the press could hear: "This feller says he can get out of anything, don't he? I had a nigger once I had to take to the loony house. Killed three guys. He got out of the jacket. He had hands like a gorilla. I fixed him up like this. He didn't get out. O.K., so let this guy get on and get out, or else give up. They've seen them kind of grips a dozen times before in their racket."

Captain Stevens looked doubtful, but I could sense that in a way he was secretly pleased that a performer who had put them to a lot of needless trouble was going to be shown up.

He said to us, "What about it, boys? You don't have to go through with it if you don't want to, but make up your minds and let's get out of here."

Harry Hopp, the reporter, said, "Don't let him do it, Carl. It's sheer murder. I'll see that he doesn't get the worst of it in the papers."

Massin laughed his loud, dirty laugh. "I knew the four-flusher would welsh."

"Welsh nothing!" I shouted. "Our contract clearly stated—"

"Quiet, everyone!" It was Armando. And even in that crisis he didn't forget the phoney Mexican accent. "Shut up, Carl."

But he wasn't looking at me. He was looking straight at Tina Massin and she at him.

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There was no mistake. They were in love, all right. They had found and lost each other in the same moment. They were saying good-bye for there was no hope for them. She was the wife of a brute who would never let her go. And he was faced with an insoluble dilemma. Because if he went through with the stunt he was a dead man. And if he backed out he might as well be dead because he would never again be The Great Armando.

He said, "All right, Sheriff, I am ready."

The sheriff stepped forward, laughing. "So long, sucker. You asked for it." Things moved fast then as he went about his legalized murder, forcing each finger of Armando's hands deep into the plaits of the straw finger-grips, then pushing his knee into Armando's back in order to haul the straps tighter.

And all the time Joe Ferris continued to look only on the white face of this girl he had come to love in such a strange manner and who had been forced to become his executioner. Her eyes were lost in his. Her lips moved, though no sound came, but I would have sworn they were communicating for the last time.

When four men lifted the mail sack, with Armando inside it, into the packing-case and the electric crane travelled over and lowered the lid onto the top, Tina Massin gave a soft cry and crumpled in a dead faint on the pier.

The sheriff laughed, saying, "Now what's the matter with her?" A newsreel cameraman shouted, "Hey, Sheriff, look out! You're in the way of the shot." I felt as if it was I who was going to die.

I jumped up on the box to stall as long as I could and give him a chance even though I knew it was hopeless. There was no signal from him as usual to let me know he was out of the jacket and sack, waiting for the touch of his finger on the faked panel that would slide open and free him as soon as he sank beneath the surface.

Then he hadn't got out. The child's toy had defeated him. The legend of The Great Armando was a thing of the past. But I was determined to save the life of Joe Ferris.

The sheriff cried, "Lower away!" and there was a cheer from the crowd as the steel cable paid out. The weighted crate went in with a splash, and began to settle as the water poured in through the seams.

I had a sickening vision of Armando, trussed up like a mummy in the horrid canvas jacket, his fingers helplessly trapped in the straw grips, the icy water pouring into the case, the mail sack filling up, his last gasp for oxygen, then the hopeless last-minute struggle, tugging against the inexorable grips, and the final

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bubble bursting from the tortured lungs. And after that, silence.

Air was rushing up in a dirty surface swirl as the case sank with its burden. When my stopwatch showed two minutes, and there was no sign of an arm or dark head breaking the grey river surface, I yelled in panic, "Haul away! Get him up out of there! Something's gone wrong! Get him up, do you hear?"

There was some confused shouting and I could see the police captain yelling futilely at the man in the travelling cabin of the crane. But there was no rattle of machinery or running of steel cable over the wheel. Something had happened to the crane or the power for I could see the operator wrestling with his levers.

I went over the side of the pier into the water. Men and women were screaming. I had a crazy idea that I could swim down, open the panel, and get him out of there, sack and all, and up to the surface. I fought the cable and my bursting lungs. Then the police-launch arrived and fished me out.

After ten minutes the power came on again and the crate was raised. But there was not a chance in the world that Armando The Great was still alive. The sheriff had won.

Workmen attacked the case with axes and crowbars. Attendants from an ambulance, their white trousers showing beneath their dark overcoats, stood by with a stretcher. With a splintering and wrenching, the side of the case broke away, revealing the locked mail sack.

And I was the first one to see that it wasn't full enough!

With a yell I broke away from Harry Hopp, seized the key from the postal inspector, and opened the padlock.

It was empty! No, not quite empty. Inside, buckled as though it had never been unfastened, with the terrible finger-grips still in place, was the strait jacket, neatly folded. But of Armando The Great there was no sign. He had accomplished his greatest escape!

It was his last, too, for he was never seen again. The police dredged, grappled, and dived for three days but his body was never recovered. He had defeated the vicious finger-grips, the jacket, the mail sack, and the case, and got out and then perhaps at the last moment, exhausted from the struggle, his strength at an end, he had drowned and been swept down the river or under a pier.

I went to hospital myself with pneumonia. They said that in my delirium I swore I'd kill Sheriff Massin for murdering my friend and partner. It turned out it wasn't necessary. Six months after the disappearance of The Great Armando I read in a newspaper that Jules Massin was shot to death in a saloon

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by the saloon-keeper he had attempted to suborn. I never heard what became of Mrs. Massin after that.

A couple of months after I came out of hospital, Captain Stevens of the River Police sent me as a souvenir the strait jacket complete with the sheriff's deadly ruse. I couldn't bear to look at it. I put it away in the bottom of my trunk with my diary of how it all happened. Then I went back into the locksmith business.

All that was thirty years ago. Now I am holding the jacket in my fingers again, for two days ago I saw Joe Ferris, The Great Armando! And with him was Tina Massin!

I'll swear it! I couldn't have been mistaken, even though his hair was white and his features changed. She looked almost the same, except happy. They were coming out of a cinema in Athens, Georgia.

I said, "Joe! Joe Ferris! And Tina Massin!"

They denied it. They stopped politely, but their expressions remained blank. The man said, "You must be mistaking us for someone else. My name is Vernon Howard, and this is Mrs. Howard here. I'm in the grain-and-feed business. Everyone in Athens knows me. And now if you'll excuse Mrs. Howard and myself . . ."

Vernon Howard's Grain and Feed Store was at the corner of Boulevard and Pecan Street. When I instituted inquiries as to how long it had been there, the invariable answer was, "Oh, 'bout as long as I kin remember . . ." But when I got down to cases, no one seemed to remember them as much as thirty years ago.

When I returned to New York I dug out the strait jacket of Sheriff Massin. I hadn't touched it since the day I thought it had killed The Great Armando. The colour on the finger-grips of plaited straw had run, but otherwise they were exactly as they had been on that fatal day.

I examined them. Then I took a magnifying glass. I tried them out, by putting my fingers in and yanking. They pulled loose. And after that I knew the secret of how The Great Armando had escaped from the inescapable trap laid for him by vindictive Sheriff Massin. The finger-stalls had been subtly and efficiently gaffed, by his wife.

The straw plaits had been cut with scissors in such a way as to defy casual inspection, but in every case destroying the tension of the plaits so that they no longer pulled against one another.

I remembered the look between them, the money he had stowed away in safe-deposit, and his remark, "If I ever get a

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real scare, I'll quit and nobody'll ever hear of The Great Armando again." How easily he could have swum ashore under cover of the panic and excitement, and vanished, to return when he read that Sheriff Massin was dead.

Yes, we'd thought of everything, except one thing, that in the end it was to be Joe Ferris, The Great Armando, who had the guts to put his faith in love as a gimmick.

★ ***When visiting Liechtenstein, a newspaper recently advised its readers, one of the first sights to see is Paul Gallico. Which, even to one whose minor passions in life include the bliss of uninterrupted peace, must be highly gratifying.***

Other joys of American sportswriter, film critic, author, and ex-war-correspondent Gallico are fencing, fishing—a house in Devon is kept for that purpose—and the company of cats. He once kept twenty-three!

★ ★ ★

YOWSIR!

Infinitesimally more useful, though far more awkward, was another Chinese phrase-book which had been issued by the United States Army. (I regretted having bought it, since I felt obliquely compromised by it; I would have gladly disposed of it had it not been for the extraordinary practical difficulty, which I have already explained, of *ever* throwing anything away.) This work, however, gave an English version of the Chinese characters, full of elaborate typographical devices to indicate inflective changes, which produced an oddly alarming effect.

"Obey or I fire!" it said: RUH! *sher* BOO! TING! *waw* DUH MING! LING! "Are you hungry?" asked the book, with a clipped emphasis: UH! *boo* UH! In its glossary a Private Soldier was, rather evocatively: UHR! *dung* BING—but a Staff Sergeant was, as one could well imagine: SHAUNG! SHER! There was a brief enquiry: "Where is a restaurant, I want to buy food," interpreted in terms suggestive of a man ravening with famine: SH-UM-*muh* DEE! *faung yo* FAHN! *gwahn* DZ! *waw* YOW! *ma–ee* CHER *duh*. Some words almost explained themselves; a Howitzer was YOO DAHN! POW!

And perhaps best of all, a Stimulant: SHING! FUN! YOW!

But times had changed. Here was I in Peking among the Puritans and there was not much Shing, very little Fun, and absolutely no Yow! at all.

JAMES CAMERON, *Mandarin Red*

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BAGHDAD BUS

BY CHRISTOPHER LANDON

INSPECTOR HAKIM of the Special Branch, Iraq Police, sat in the foyer of the Grand Orient Hotel, fingering his beads as he said the ninety-nine names of Allah and wondered about the girl on the sofa opposite.

She was so different.

In the swirl and colour of the Damascus crowd that moved or sat in the stone-flagged hall, she stood out as something fresh and alien to the East.

Hakim the poet searched for a metaphor. What was the name of that pale, fragrant flower that the English tried, so hopelessly, to grow in the heat of the Baghdad summer? A sweet pea—that was it! a sweet pea among over-blown roses.

He took in each detail: the fair hair, the grey eyes, and the generous mouth. She must be American, he thought—then the neat white blouse, and grey skirt. Lower, to her legs, slim, long, with good nylons and shoes.

An American, he said to himself. Skinny, but they always are. All ribs—not the curves of our girls. But perhaps it is a good thing East and West think differently.

She was sitting quite still, hands in lap, feet close together, staring straight in front of her. His eyes roamed to the two grips that must be her luggage. They were at the far end of the sofa—perhaps a little too far for safety. His mind went back to other, more personal problems.

It had been a bad trip. He was going back to Baghdad without the man.

It had been a matter of opium, but the Lebanese had not considered there was enough evidence to extradite. He had been responsible for the evidence . . . the Commissioner would be very angry.

He sighed as he shifted the weight of the handcuffs in his jacket pocket.

An urchin, in a filthy flapping robe, had slipped past the porter at the entrance and was wheeling in and out of the groups like some sea-bird seeking food. The bright eyes lit on the two bags at the end of the sofa and he swooped on them. As a hand

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darted out to snatch, Hakim's cane cracked down on the wrist.

The boy screeched, let go, and jinked off out of sight in the crowd. Hakim picked up the bags and placed them gently at the girl's feet. There was just time to read the label.

He touched his sidara—the black felt cap of the civilian. "It is advisable, Miss, to keep all valuables in close sight here."

The cool grey eyes looked up at him. "Thank you."

Hakim sat down beside her. "I see you are travelling to Baghdad by the Nairn Bus?"

"Yes."

"As it happens, so am I. May I offer you a seat in my taxi to the terminus?" He was proud of his English.

"No, thank you. I am waiting for a friend."

"So you go for a holiday? You will find Baghdad very pleasant now, after the heat of the summer."

"I go on business." The finality of that remark was sealed by the next action. She opened her handbag and got out her compact to powder her face.

The Inspector stared, flushed, and then rose to his feet. "I am sorry. I did not mean to be discourteous."

She did not answer. As he walked out of the foyer, the last view he had of her was the same as the first—alone on the sofa, still, hands in lap as she stared straight in front of her.

The bus was already waiting when he got to the terminus. It looked rather like an aeroplane without wings—the sixty-foot, smooth cigar-shape, with the windows running down the sides that housed the passengers, was hitched to the squat powerful tractor that would haul it all through the night across the desert to Baghdad, five hundred miles away.

Inside, the similarity to a plane was even more marked. The seats were in pairs, with a centre gangway between; to the front, a small bar, with a white-coated Iraqi steward smiling over the counter; behind, the luggage space and the twin toilets.

Inspector Hakim went on board, reserved a gangway seat with his hand-grip, and then went back to the shade of the customs shed to watch the other passengers arrive.

They were a mixed lot. English oil men in tweeds, Baghdadis in grey suits and sidaras, two nondescript Persians, and—a reminder of the desert road—some tribesmen, splendid in Argal and Kaftan, with rifles slung across their backs.

It was evening and the customs officials were tired; their searching perfunctory. Still there was no sign of the girl.

It was barely a quarter of an hour before starting-time when she appeared at the entry to the customs shed, walking beside a very fat man who jerked along in a tripping, toes-in gait.

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As they walked up to the counter, the Inspector's eyes narrowed; he waited only to hear the first words of that twittering, breathless voice as the fat man turned to speak to the taxi-driver following behind him with the bags, before he was sure. He turned to the customs chief who was standing beside him and to whom he had introduced himself.

He said quickly, " The girl is all right. But that fat one—I know him. He is bad. If this were Iraq, I would—" He made a gesture of stripping off his coat.

" Thank you, friend."

As he started to move along the counter, Hakim said, " I go to the bus. If there is anything, I would like to know."

All the other passengers except those two were inside already when he claimed his seat. He found that he was next to a tall, thin fellow countryman with a livid scar splayed across one cheek; an uncommunicative type, he decided, after a few grunts had been the only response to his conversation.

He turned and looked back at the two empty seats with the reserved labels on the other side of the gangway, then at the blank entrance of the customs shed. They must be taking his advice. Time of departure came, and still there was no sign of them. He smiled as he watched the impatience grow in the Europeans, shading down by degrees to the complete indifference of the tribesmen. Arms folded, they sat impassive, staring straight ahead. He knew what they were thinking: that the bus would start when God willed. It was so much simpler.

At last a group of figures came out of the shed. The girl and the fat man walking side by side, the driver of the bus and his mate following behind, carrying their cases.

Inspector Hakim did not look round when they got on board. His sense of smell and his hearing were acute enough to locate them: the sickly breath of sandalwood from the grease of the fat man's hair, the rushing, twittering voice, now speaking English, as he fussed the girl to the window seat. The Inspector's eyes were intent on his own companion, who was craning round to stare across the gangway.

He saw recognition flood into the eyes—then something else, like a glint of fire. The flicker of expression on the face was not pleasant. Hakim turned to the gangway at a tug on his sleeve. It was the steward. " I was asked to give you this, sir." Hakim thanked him and put the thin, folded sheet of the note into his wallet without reading it.

The bus moved off down the road to the east, and after a few miles, turned south onto the desert. Gradually the houses

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ceased, the clumps of olive thinned out, and the patches of corn were farther and farther apart. Then there was nothing but the flat emptiness of the desert, a red that shaded to purple where the night was sliding up from the east. The sun sank and the shadow of the bus stretched away from it across the sand.

Suddenly, there was nothing—no difference between earth and sky. Only the white pencils of the headlights stabbed their way into the darkness ahead, eating up the kilometres between the whitewashed stones that were the only mark of their course.

The bus ran smoothly, without vibration; they might have been floating in the dark void of space. Only an occasional soft jerk as a wheel went over a stone told that they were earthbound.

Inside, the soft lights and the hum of quiet conversation gave a sense of warm intimacy. Most of the passengers had let their seats down to the reclining position now, but two of the Englishmen were still at the bar, and Inspector Hakim went up to sit next to them while he had a cup of coffee.

He started talking to them in a pleasant, casual fashion, and listened with amusement to their bitter complaints on the shortcomings of their transport. It appeared that the lock on the door of the men's toilet was broken.

As he slipped from the stool, he smiled at them. "I will go and see if I can fix it, gentlemen. In any case, I do not think the lady will mind if we use the other. After all, she is only one to nineteen."

He walked down the gangway, past the rows of nodding, sleepy heads towards the back of the bus; the fat man and the girl seemed to be the only ones awake and talking now. When he drew level with them, the twittering voice stopped suddenly. He took in the fat one, leaning over towards the girl, who seemed to be pressed back against the wall. She had switched out the light above her, and he could not see the expression on her face. As he walked on, wrinkling his nose against the reek of sandalwood, he wondered why there was so much to talk about.

The lock was irreparable, but he remembered the note he had not yet read and leaned back against the inside of the door, swaying easily with the movement of the bus. He opened the sheet of paper.

We looked at the girl's bags, but as you said, there was nothing. We stripped the other, and everything he had. Nothing, either. God go with you.

"Ha!" said Inspector Hakim as he tore it into little pieces and flushed it down the toilet, "when we are in authority—at Rutbah Wells—we shall do that all again, and take off his skin if necessary. That one does not travel to Damascus just to meet a girl."

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When he got back to his seat, they were still talking. He let down the adjustment, folded his arms, and closed his eyes. Even that voice behind was soothing, though he could not hear what it said. He wondered about them for a little, but until Rutbah, it was really not his business. There was the matter of what he would say to the Commissioner on his empty-handed return to Baghdad . . . far more important. He was tired. The movement of the bus rocked him off to sleep.

The squeal of pain woke him suddenly and completely. It came from behind and across the aisle. The fat man was standing by his seat, holding his wrist, while a trickle of blood spread down to his fingers. The little eyes glowed like coals as he looked down at the girl.

She was pressed tight into her corner, intent, with the one hand that showed above the loose cover of her blanket holding a large open safety-pin like a dagger.

Hakim took it all in during the second before he was beside them. " Egg of a dog," he said quietly to the fat man, " get thee to my seat. Or the next time we speak will be in the Court at Baghdad, and you will be loaded with chains."

The fat man went.

Hakim stood for a moment, looking up and down the bus. No one seemed to have noticed. In front of the girl, the two tribesmen were snoring in rhythm, their long rifles sticking out at odd angles from behind their shoulders. Behind, the Persians sighed and muttered in their dreams. There was no movement from the Iraqi in the seat beside the one he had just left.

He slipped into the seat beside her. " What happened? " he asked softly.

He felt her stiffen. " I don't like roving hands—his, or anyone's."

Turning sideways, looking into those grey eyes that were so shadowed and watchful, he started to whisper. " I cannot show you my credentials, for I am in a foreign country "—he looked at his watch—" for a few hours yet. But if you care to feel in my coat pocket, the side one nearest to you, you will find the tools of my trade. Perhaps they will reassure you."

There was a pause; then slowly she relaxed, and he felt a hand touch his pocket. " Handcuffs? Then you are—? "

" Yes. A police-officer. Of Iraq."

There was a pause. " Would you like a cup of coffee? " he said. " I can wake the steward."

" No, thank you."

" Then try to sleep—and forget about it."

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When he turned to look again she was curled up on her side, but her eyes were still open. For the first time, she smiled. "It's no good. There is so much to think about."

"It is the same for me," he said. "Let us talk, then. Do you know Baghdad?"

"No."

"I do not think the Americans—or English—really care for our city, but to me it is the best in the world. I have a little house that leads off a lane from River Street. I think you would like it. There is a balcony where you can sit and look at the Tigris flowing right under your feet—a still blue in the summer, or a sliding lion's skin during the floods. Then, in the front, there is a courtyard where I grow roses. I have some new ones just coming into flower. So beautiful, heavy, deep copper colour, and such a scent. Their name is—some Irish lady?"

"Mrs. McGredy," she said.

He smiled. "Oh yes, that is it. I love my roses. Then there is my family. Two daughters, growing up and at High School. They are the new country, speak good English, go to all the movies. They would be honoured to meet a lady like you. My wife, too. She is of the old ways and has no English—but she is good and kind and would make you very welcome."

"They sound nice. Your family—and your house."

He pulled out his notebook. "May I give you the address? We would like to see you, if you can spare the time."

She smiled as she took the slip of paper. "I seem to be collecting these. He—" she jerked her head across the gangway —"gave me another earlier."

Hakim hesitated, choosing his words. "I know him. Will you forgive me if I say that he is bad?"

"I know now."

"Your business in Baghdad, is it with him?"

"No. A friend of his." She mentioned a name and a night club. Hakim knew both and did not like them. "I am a dancer," she went on. "I have taken an engagement there. This man was sent to escort me."

"Have you a contract?"

"Oh yes. Would you like to see it?" She reached for her bag.

"Don't trouble. I should not understand it. But they have given you a good advance, I suppose?"

"A week—and my fare over. They said they would fix the rest when I arrive."

Hakim said carefully, "I would like you to remember my address. In case there is difficulty with the contract, I mean."

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She looked at him contemptuously. "There's always the Consul."

"Of course."

And what use is he, he thought, if you have not the means—or will—to reach him? You don't know what they are capable of. Locked doors . . . Hashish . . . Opium. And then would come the shame. Down and down—to finish in those cages.

There was a long silence. He listened to the hum of the tyres, the creak of the coach, and the noise of the sleepers. Another sound came into the pattern again: voices talking. It was the fat man and his own former companion. He could not catch the words, but the tone was of bitter argument. There was something else: the high, tripping voice and the deep guttural answers formed another pattern—*he had heard them together before.*

Somewhere . . . memory stirred . . . a dark alley and those two same voices, quarrelling; then a scuffle. But where? When? It didn't matter. It would come back.

There was the faintest sound beside him and he turned to see that she was asleep. He closed his eyes. Soon he too was drifting off.

The second wakening was as quick and complete as the first, and this time for a more compelling reason. The screaming—a steady one-note penetration—was coming from the back of the coach.

As he jerked to his feet, his trained eye took in the entire compass of the coach in one instant. Like the lens of a camera, it registered the vista of craning necks, the rubbed or staring eyes, and the empty seats. There were three of them: the two opposite, where he had started the journey, the other . . . He looked down with dismay and incredulity: the girl had gone. He put one hand on the discarded blanket—almost cold—and then dashed to the back of the coach.

The tall thin Iraqi was standing just forward of the luggage racks; his eyes were tight shut and his mouth a small round O from which issued the steady stream of sound. Hakim slapped his face hard, and the noise stopped like the turning-off of a tap.

"What is it, dog?"

The voice shuddered. Words came out one by one, thickly. "In—there—the toilet—"

Inspector Hakim gave him a push in the direction of his seat, then turned to where the steward was scrambling up over the bar. "Tell the crew to stop," he shouted, then to the rest of the passengers, "Please sit down." He turned towards the toilets.

The doors were side by side, facing him. The right-hand one,

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the gentlemen's, showed a crack of light where the door was not quite shut, and he remembered the broken lock. He tried the handle of the other door; it was locked. Levering against the soft, heavy resistance inside the first one, he worked it open sufficiently to get his head and shoulders through. The first thing he saw was the blood on the floor.

The fat man was jammed behind the door, and half sitting on the container for dirty towels. His head drooped forward over the basin, lolling in the slight motion of the bus as it slowed down. The white smear of shaving-soap ended in an abrupt line on the left side of the neck. Below that, everything was a different colour. The blood-vessels had been cut in one stroke.

Inspector Hakim stared. Then one hand came forward to take hold of the tuft of hair that stuck up, incongruously, from the smooth black sheen of the rest of the head. Gently, he pulled the head over until he could see the other side of the face, gently let it fall back. "Shaved on the right cheek, just starting on the left," he said, "but where is the razor?"

He saw it almost at once, lying on the floor, at the edge of the pool. It was the open kind, with blade and handle hinged at right angles. He squatted, staring as closely as he could at the film of soap that covered the bright steel blade, then pushed it to one side with the tip of his fountain-pen.

A gentle lurch told him that the bus had stopped, and then the faintest sound behind him made him turn his head. The girl was standing in the half-open door, white in the face, staring.

"Go to your seat," he said.

"What—what's happened?"

He turned back to his contemplation. "I think you know. But go to your seat now. And speak to no one."

As he waited for the sound of her feet to die away, he had one last look at the gaping wound in the neck. Then he pulled the door shut and went back to the centre of the car.

The passengers seemed to be a frozen group, some standing, some sitting. Through the black square of night that filled the open door of the bus, the driver and his mate were gaping.

"Where are we, driver?" said Hakim.

"A hundred kilometres from Rutbah Wells. What has happened?"

"An accident," said the Inspector pleasantly. "So we are in Iraq. That is good." He produced his card. "Now, here are your orders. Unhitch the tractor and get you quickly to Rutbah. Give this to the Commandant"—he was scribbling in his note-book while he spoke—"and then return with your tractor and the reserve bus. Hurry."

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Then he turned and made a different version of the same speech in two languages. "I am a police-officer of Iraq," he said. "And now we have passed into the Kingdom of Iraq, I shall take charge. There has been an accident. I ask you all to sit down and remain calm."

Slowly they subsided. In the silence that followed, there were only the moans of the Iraqi, now back in his seat and entirely covered with a blanket, then the sounds of the jacks being wound down in front of the bus. After that, the hum of the tractor, growing fainter and fainter.

Inspector Hakim stood in front of the luggage racks, facing them all. He did not go near the girl.

The bigger, redder-faced Englishman came uncertainly down the aisle. "What has happened, Sergeant?"

"Inspector, sir."

"I beg your pardon—Inspector."

"There has been an accident to one of the passengers while he was shaving. He has cut his throat."

"Good lord! But—"

The Inspector cut him short. "I have sent the tractor on to Rutbah to collect more suitable transport. Until it arrives, I regret there is nothing to do but wait."

"How long will they be?"

Hakim shrugged. "About four hours—if they are quick."

"But we can't just sit here."

"I agree. It is unpleasant." He looked out of one of the windows towards the east. "But very soon the sun will be up—already I think I see the change to the false dawn. Then you will be better outside, and we shall have moved before the sun is too hot. In the meantime, I'll order the steward to prepare hot drinks and food for all."

While waiting, he spent the time arranging the luggage as a barrier to seal off the right-hand toilet. When he was moving the girl's cases, his hand lingered for a moment on the clasps. Then he shook his head and smiled. He was remembering the customs . . . the urchin in the Hotel . . . the way they had not been guarded. When he had finished, he went to the open door.

The false dawn came, making only the difference from the total black of night to the two greys of sand and sky. Then two small clouds high in the east became bars of gold, and the lip of the blood-red sun bit over the horizon. The purple shadows ran forward and faded, to leave an unending brown plain and the blue sky of day.

The Moslems were out first, moving a little apart on the sand for the dawn prayer. Inspector Hakim spread a blanket just

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outside the door of the bus, kicked off his shoes, and faced towards Mecca. A little wind ran over the face of the desert and then it was still again. "In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful . . ." He fingered his amulet.

In the bus, the Christians sat silent, sealed off by an invisible barrier. The girl looked out of her window at the glory of the dawn, listening to the soft words she could not understand.

When Hakim came back, his voice was gentle. "Will you please all get out now? It is quite warm. But please do not go too far away—I may want to ask a few questions."

As they filed out and the girl passed him, he smiled at her and spoke for the first time. "Already, in my country, you have seen something good. The dawn, in a desert unmarked by man."

He sat on the step and had them up one by one; smiling, suave, courteous, asking a few questions, writing down the answers as his pen raced from right to left across the pages of his notebook. He asked each to sign his statement, and then requesting that he might be permitted to search each one, suddenly, without asking, he made an odd movement that was greeted with astonishment, outrage, or indifference, according to the temper of the interviewed.

When only the girl was left sitting forlorn and cross-legged on the red sand, wrapped in her blanket, Inspector Hakim flipped over the pages of his notebook and sucked his teeth. As the steward passed him to refill the tray with tea and cakes for the scattered group on the desert, he caught his arm. "Tea for the lady and myself next. I shall take it over on the tray."

The steward looked past him into the bus. "And for that one?" Hakim turned his head. The tall Iraqi was still huddled on his seat, covered by the blanket.

"No. He can wait until I have finished with the lady."

He walked over slowly and put down the tray of tea and cakes beside her. She looked up from the pattern of black pebbles she had been arranging on the sand and smiled at him. He thought she looked very beautiful with the long fair hair hanging down her shoulders. He squatted down beside her and looked at the pattern of stones. "Marking the place where you have camped in the desert?"

She smiled again. "I was thinking—and there was nothing else to do."

Silence, while they both sipped and munched. Then he said suddenly, "Your friend—the fat one—do you think it reasonable that he should go for a shave on a bus in the middle of the night?"

She shrugged. "I think he was vain, even with all those pockmarks. That scent . . ." She wrinkled her nose.

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"It clings, that sandalwood," he said. "Yes, perhaps he thought he would get back in your esteem if he appeared fresh and clean in the morning." He took another bite of cake. "We will agree on that, then. But we must continue with this shave, for of all that have ever been performed, it was the most curious."

"Why?"

"I shall show you. First, how I would do it myself." He shot a hand out into the empty air and then started making little dabs at his face. "I soap myself . . . Now, for the shave."

Right hand crossed over to the left cheek and he started stroking gently. "First the left side, then the right." He turned triumphantly. "You see?"

"See what?" she said.

"The reverse of the way he did it. Because I am right-handed—and nine out of ten men shave to the same pattern."

"You mean—he must have been left-handed?"

"He must have been."

"He wasn't," she said. "I know."

He stared at her. "How do you know?"

"I told you he gave me that address. I can distinctly remember him writing it—with his right hand."

Hakim's eyes narrowed. "Ah, that address. May I see it?"

"Of course." She opened her handbag and passed over a slip of paper.

He frowned as he read the printed words. "What was this address for?"

"He said that I could get a good, clean apartment there."

He folded the paper and put it in his pocket. "I would not recommend that address," he said.

There was a silence. "A curious shave," he went on reflectively, "because he cut his throat first—and shaved afterwards. The razor was lying on the floor, and there was soap on the blade—right up to the edge of it. There should have been blood on it, except on the edge used to make the cut. But there was no blood on it. And the cut, did you see it?" His voice had taken on a dreamlike quality.

She turned her head away. "It was horrible—I'll never forget."

"But interesting, the way it ran: from the chin at a downward angle towards the back of the neck. No left-handed man could have done that to himself—even deliberately."

"Then someone else—" She had gone very pale.

"Yes. Some other left-handed person—" he seemed to linger on that word—"who came in quickly through the door that wouldn't lock, and did it from behind; someone who grasped

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the fat one's hair with the other hand to pull the neck tight. Someone who was not very clever over one thing, and too clever over another."

"I don't understand."

"This person tried to make it seem as if the man had begun to shave—which he hadn't—with the intention of making us think it was done with the razor—which it wasn't. This person should have cleaned the edge of the razor and dropped it in the blood on the floor, and then, when shaving part of the face afterwards, he should have remembered not to do it the way a left-handed person would normally shave."

He broke off abruptly. "Now, I want to ask you a few more questions. When you went to the toilet, was the man next to the fat one still in his place?"

"Yes."

"How long were you there?"

"A minute—perhaps two. Then the screaming started."

Hakim's pen raced from right to left over the page as answer followed question. "Did you hear anything before that?"

"No."

"Did you try the door of the other toilet?"

"I don't usually try to open doors marked *Gentlemen*."

He sighed. "Thank you. If you will be good enough to sign." He handed her the notebook, and she signed slowly and carefully, then held it out to him.

"No," he said, "please sign properly—with the hand you always use. The left one."

She stared at him.

"In the hotel at Damascus," he said gently, "when you wished to be rid of me, you started to powder your nose, holding the puff in the left, the compact in the right hand. I notice these things. Then on the bus, when you had to teach the fat one a lesson, that pin was in your left hand. Do not lie to me: I want to help—but others in authority might not be so well disposed."

She gave a sound that was near a sob; then she changed over the pen and signed again. As she returned the book to him, he caught her right wrist and pulled the hand sharply under his nose, smelling. Then he let it go.

"No. You did not do it, I know that. You are not tall enough nor strong enough, and there is no trace of the scent of his hair-oil on your hand. You would not know nor care on which side a man starts to shave his face. The weapon—and that must be found—you would have wanted to get rid of it, to bury it out here—" he looked at the pattern of pebbles on the

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sand—" not to mark the only spot you could have done so. Please do not spoil this belief with stupid lies."

" I don't know what you mean."

He looked at the notebook. " You said you were in the toilet for only two minutes. It must have been much longer. Your blanket on the seat next to mine was cold when the screaming woke me. I suggest you wanted to talk to the fat one privately; that you walked to the back of the bus when he went to the toilet, and waited for him to come out. Something happened to make you hide in the other one, and you heard quite a lot."

She stared down at the sand. " I wanted to give him something back."

" What? "

It came out in a rush. " He asked me to carry his wallet through the customs—said he had more money than is allowed. He said he would collect it in Iraq. After what you said and what happened on the bus, I didn't want to have any more dealings with him. I was awake when he went back there, and followed—to give it back. Then other footsteps approached. I was scared, so I slipped into the ladies' side and waited."

" Did you see who came? " He was intent now, leaning forward, staring at her.

" No."

" Did you hear anything? "

" No voices, if that's what you mean. There was a sort of bumping—and then the screaming."

" Did the toilet flush? " The intensity in his voice was almost agonizing.

" No. No, I'm quite sure it didn't."

" The weapon," he said, " I was afraid it might be that way it went, miles behind us now, hidden for ever. It must be here, then."

His gaze travelled round the group on the desert, then over to the bus. " All have signed, or made their mark, with the right hand. None has the smell of the hair-oil on his hand. No trace of a weapon. And only one left to see." He got to his feet. " I shall be back, but may I have that wallet, please? "

She opened her bag and produced a thin bill-fold from which a sheaf of five-dinar notes jutted. He pulled them out and flicked through them. " Good money—not too much. The customs would not bother about an American lady's note-case when they can see what it contains."

He smiled at her, put the wallet in his pocket, and strolled over towards the bus.

Inside it was cool and quiet. The Iraqi had discarded the

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blanket and was sitting up, almost composed. Inspector Hakim opened his notebook at random. "The story you told me before —I have it here—shall I read it to you before you sign?"

"No, Inspector, I will sign now."

Hakim held out the notebook, but made no effort to reach for the pen hidden in his pocket.

"Have you a pen, Inspector?"

"Mine has run dry, friend, with all this writing. But I see one gleaming from the inside of your coat. Use that."

The other's eyes flickered away. Then, slowly, he reached for it, unscrewed the top, and began to sign.

Hakim's eyes remained fixed on his hand. "Left-handed men are uncommon in our country, friend." His voice was dreamy.

Then he struck. His left hand shot out and gripped the other's right, to bring it up to his nose before bending it back in a judo lock, while his right hand grasped the hand that held the pen.

"Let me look at that pen of yours"—the words came spitting out as he bent the other back over the seat—"that pen with such a strange long cap and an opening at the top."

"No! no!" the other screamed, "it is not mine—it belongs to a friend. It is not mine, I tell you."

There was no knowing which of them touched the catch, but with a sharp click, a thin razor-edged steel blade shot out of the opening. It was not very clean.

"Then let us hope that thy friend prays for thee now," said Hakim when the other had gone limp and he had handcuffed him to the seat. "Thou wilt surely need it."

When he walked back towards the girl he had the wallet in his hand. There was a low humming noise in the east and she was standing, looking hopefully out across the red plain. "I can't see anything," she said.

"Sight comes after sound in the desert." He was smiling at her. "Could I have your bag for a moment, please?"

She handed it over without a word, and he stuffed the wad of orange-coloured notes inside and closed the snap. He gave it back to her with a little bow. "Will you accept that as a gesture of gratitude from my Government?"

"Gratitude? Why, Inspector?"

Hakim the poet spoke first. "In my garden, I like to see the roses on the branch, not picked and blown and dead in a day"—he felt inside the empty wallet. Then the Inspector took over. "You have given great assistance. Feel there."

She ran her fingers round the bottom of one compartment. "Little hard lumps," she said.

"Diamonds. I am so certain, I shall not bother to open it."

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He took the wallet back and put it in his pocket. The noise was much louder, and now there were two thin rods hanging in the curtain of the mirage towards the east.

"The buses," he said. "When you get to Baghdad, go straight to my house and tell my daughters I shall be delayed by a little business." He jerked his head towards the bus. "Then rest a little, see the sights, and—go back where you belong."

"But why do you do all this for me, Inspector?"

He was still smiling. "I went to Lebanon to bring back a man on an opium charge—and failed. Now I can weigh the other scale with a murder already solved, a criminal already caught, a bad man dead, and a quantity of smuggled diamonds. It will more than balance—I shall have great advancement."

She was laughing now, the sunlight of it behind her eyes. "I'm looking forward to seeing your roses."

The sun was high and hot when the square block of Rutbah Fort first showed as a thin dancing column in the mirage. Inspector Hakim was sitting in the spare driver's seat of the tractor. He was sweating, but happy. He looked at the reserve bus, toiling ahead of them, then thought of an unhappy one, chained to a seat in the empty bus behind.

His fingers came up to loosen the tie that seemed to strangle him; they touched the leather amulet under his shirt. He gave a short laugh. "What ails thee, friend?" said the driver.

"I was thinking of the words written on my amulet . . . *The Lord of the Daybreak preserve me against the night—and against the mischief of women.*"

★ ★ ★

CORPSE DIPLOMATIC

I believe my mother was the first woman to swim the Bosphorus, at any rate in recorded times, and Aunt Adeline disported herself in the same waters when most Englishwomen were just emerging from their bathing-machines. Once she was caught in a sudden very strong current, and only saved from drowning by coming up against a dead horse, which she rode in triumph to safety. She was always getting out of difficulties in unexpected ways. When she absent-mindedly went down the steps of a public lavatory in Vienna on the Gents' side instead of the Ladies', she tripped up on her long black skirt and fell straight into the arms of her old friend the Turkish Ambassador, whom she hadn't seen for years.

R. H. PEARSON, *Baynton House*

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Golden Age

To estimate your Worth,
Be certain as to date of Birth

AUSTIN DOBSON

" We've all got to be young once," said Mr. Thompson. " It's like the measles, it breaks out all over you, and you're a nuisance to yourself and everybody else, but it don't last, and it usually don't leave no ill-effects." He was so pleased with this notion he forgot and broke into a guffaw.

KATHERINE ANNE PORTER, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*

Small Heed

" Children who paddle where the ocean bed shelves steeply
Must take care they do not
Paddle too deeply."

Thus spake the awful ageing couple
Whose heart the years had turned to rubble.

But the little children, to save any bother,
Let it go in at one ear and out at the other.

STEVIE SMITH, *Advice to Young Children*

Young Idea

" What does Toby eat? "
" Very nice bun. Henry and Megan and Toby."
" Does Toby have the biggest? "
" Oh, no, dear little bun."
" Does William have a bun too? "
" No, very nice beer."
" What do you like best to eat? "
" Only bacon," said Toby.
" Surely he does not have that? " said Cassius.
" He likes the smell of it," said Megan. "And he may have tasted it."

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"Always eat bacon," said Toby.

"You should say what is true," said his father. "You know you do not have it to eat."

"No, not good for him, poor little boy!"

"A child is a strange thing," said Cassius, as they were left alone.

"It is a natural thing," said his wife. "That is why it strikes a civilised person as strange."

"Yes, well, I suppose one is a civilised person," said her husband, on a faintly gratified note, "though one does not think of oneself in that way . . ."

I. COMPTON-BURNETT, *The Present and the Past*

Marginal Comment

The two old men
Sit in silence together,
Living in dim Memories
Of the past.
They are lifelong friends
And need no words
To share their thoughts.
One quavers to the other:
"May you live a hundred years,
And may I live ninety-nine."

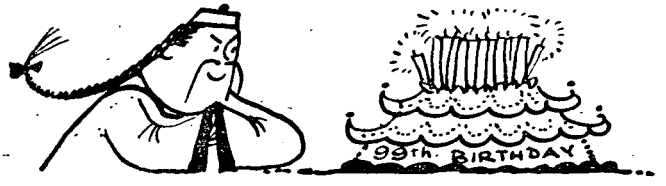
HSÜ CHI, *Old Friends*

Timely Warning

"Do you men also worry much about getting old?" asked Mother.

"In the West they do not like to tell their age," said Cousin Hsian Kwang. "It would be an unforgivable mistake to ask an English or French lady her age at a first meeting, as we Chinese do. Even a man would not be pleased if you asked him at your first meeting."

SU HUA, *Ancient Melodies*



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Reflection

Middle age
Is a time of life
That a man first notices
In his wife.

RICHARD ARMOUR, *Middle Age*

Ripeness is All

Men of fifty don't dance mazurkas, being generally too fat and wheezy; nor do they sit for hours together on river banks at their mistresses' feet, being somewhat afraid of rheumatism. But for real true love—love at first sight, love to devotion, love that robs a man of his sleep, love that " will gaze an eagle blind," love that " will hear the lowest sound when the suspicious tread of theft is stopped," love that is " like a Hercules, still climbing trees in the Hesperides "—we believe the best age is from forty-five to seventy; up to that, men are generally given to mere flirting.

ANTHONY TROLLOPE, *Barchester Towers*

Lasting—

Talk not of hearts,
Of flames and darts,
Soon flatt'ry turns to snarling;
To pass my life
A happy wife,
Make me an old man's darling.

THEODORE HOOK, *The Soldier's Return*

—Happiness

An archaeologist is the best husband any woman can have: the older she gets the more he is interested in her.

AGATHA CHRISTIE

Summary

" *It's old men who dream dreams, old chap. Young men see visions. And, brother, what visions !* "

DAVID BEATY, *The Heart of the Storm*

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SERPENT IN THE SUN

BY HUGH B. CAVE

HALFWAY up the mountainside young Father André lifted his throbbing bare head to gaze despairingly at the trail above, and then succumbed to the weakness in his knees and sank onto a boulder. The big fellow on the beach had been right: this high-noon tropical sun could eat a man alive. He should have sent one of the islanders for a horse, Father André thought, instead of being so foolishly eager to prove himself.

Looking down, he shuddered at the height to which he had climbed. The native fishing-boat on which he had crossed from the mainland was a mere chip. He could see the whole of the mile-wide channel—oddly, it seemed calm from this height; and on the far shore he could see the rusted iron roofs of the little mainland village where he had spent the night after his day-long bus ride from the capital.

His head ached and he pressed his hands hard against his forehead to ease the pain. It helped a little. Nothing could be done about his nausea, brought on by the mad pitching of the boat. His only consolation there was that even the sailors of Columbus had found the channel a challenge when they had explored the Caribbean more than four hundred years ago.

Wiping the clammy perspiration from his face with the hem of his cassock, he lay back with his small suitcase beside him and an arm across his eyes. Too long in the sun would be fatal, and the trail here was a naked jumble of boulders; but a five-minute rest would let the strength flow back into his aching legs . . .

"Father! Wake up!" He struggled to open his eyes. The world was aflame and whirling, as though seen through crimson glasses with wildly spinning lenses. A hand slipped under his shoulders, another beneath his knees, and he was lifted. Through the flaming pin-wheels a face came into focus.

"You should not sleep here, Father. I told you on the beach, this sun can eat a man!" It was the big fellow who had helped him board the boat by carrying him like a babe through the boiling

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surf on the mainland beach, and then had steadied him on the voyage over, when his stomach rebelled. A remarkable fellow, strong as an ox, but gentle and solicitous. With a sigh, Father André went limp in the huge black arms.

For a time he was aware of the slap of the big man's bare feet on the rocks as he was borne upward. Then exhaustion closed his eyes, and when he awoke the second time he was blessedly cool, with a clean sheet under him and a breeze on his face.

The man standing over him this time was a white man, garbed in shirt and trousers of khaki and smoking a cigarette with a drooping inch of ash. His hands were in his trouser pockets and he smiled. A tall man, Father Justin, but not fat. His chopped hair and twinkling blue eyes gave him such a boyish look that Father André found it hard to believe he could be in his fifties, as reported.

"Better?" Ignoring the ashes that fell from his cigarette, the island priest laid a cool, long-fingered hand on the younger man's brow. "I'd have sent someone to meet you, but I didn't expect you until tomorrow."

"My replacement arrived a day early and I was eager to get here." Young Father André felt for the floor with his feet. "That big fellow who carried me up here, Father—do you know him?"

"Jumelle? Yes, I know him."

"He looked after me on the boat, though not for my sake, I'm sure," Father André said. "Only out of respect for you."

The island priest shrugged.

Young Father André glanced about the room, wondering if it was to be his. He hoped so. It was on the second floor of the rectory, with a door at each end opening onto a verandah; and since the rectory was perched on top of the island's ridge, the chamber was a blessed relief from the smothering August heat. To be able to live in such a place and work with Father Justin . . .

Even in the capital this Father Justin was a legend. A doctor before becoming a missionary, and a soldier of France before that, he had come to the island nine years ago, when there was nothing here. Now there was a church and a rectory; there were chapels; there was a dispensary where Father Justin laboured daily to keep his fifteen thousand islanders healthy.

With his own two hands this Father Justin had wrought a miracle. Let me be a little bit like him, Father André prayed.

At one of the twin doorways a small boy beckoned energetically. "Come quick, Father Justin! There is a man at the dispensary with a foot full of sickness! He asks for you!"

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"They always come just at mealtimes." The tall priest slapped Father André's shoulder and laughed. "But you won't want dinner yet anyway, eh? Come down when you've had a sleep." Out he went, striding.

For a time young Father André obediently tried to sleep, but his eyes and mind would not shut; and presently he put his feet into his shoes and went out on the south verandah. From there he could see the difficult mountainside up which he had toiled, and the flecks of white on the false calm of the channel.

Was that a native sailboat or one of the caravels of Columbus? Or the ghost of some pirate ship returning from a foray? His breath fluttered in his throat. He had imagination—sometimes too much of it for his own good, he suspected.

He went back through his room to the north verandah and gazed down in rapturous contentment on the hard brown earth of the rectory yard. Chickens wandered about. Children played. Rich aromas climbed from the white-walled kitchen.

It was all good. In the capital he had dreamt of it ever since he had been selected to fill the place of Father Justin's assistant who had asked to be relieved. In the capital Father André had taught school—probably not very well—while longing for a wider opportunity. It was all around him here, that opportunity. He had only to measure up to it.

He hurried the length of the verandah, descended the stairs, and crossed the yard to the dispensary. A man and two women sat on a bench against a whitewashed wall, the man gripping a swollen jaw, one of the women clutching a naked infant. Through an open door beyond, Father André saw the wide shoulders of the doctor-priest bent over a man on a table, a shining knife-point probing the sole of the man's gargantuan foot.

Drawn as by a magnet, Father André crossed the plank floor of the waiting-room, and then he heard the whispers from the people on the bench: "Sick—on the boat . . . Afraid of the sea . . . And Jumelle had to carry him up the mountain . . ."

He halted, feeling his hands clench and grow moist, while the sickness in his stomach welled up to smother him. He could not turn to look at the people on the bench, could not move at all until a muttered exclamation from the operating-room broke the intolerable bonds. Father Justin beckoned.

"Hold it a minute. Here." The infected foot had been opened and had begun to drain. Father Justin grabbed Father André's hands and folded them about the sick man's ankle, and then he sloshed strong-smelling liquid into a white enamel basin. While the doctor-priest noisily washed himself, Father André held the sick man's foot.

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"All right. Thanks." The big, capable hands took charge again and Father André could step back. "Lovely mess, isn't it?" Incredibly, the older man was grinning. "The idiot stepped on a broken bottle three weeks ago but wouldn't come to me until his voodoo doctors had done their best to kill him. I ought to make him walk home on it. Teach him a lesson."

Father Justin finished swiftly, cutting, draining, cleaning. Reaching for a bandage at last, he glanced at Father André and frowned quizzically. "Matter with you? Sick?"

"The smell," Father André lied.

"Oh, that!" A shrug. "Poor beggar can't help it. Now when they *really* smell bad, too lazy to bathe, I give them the devil."

Like a sickness, the knowledge of what the islanders were saying festered in him: "The young Father is a coward and a weakling. Have you heard?" Dinner was no help, not even the rum cocktail prepared by Father Justin to spice the savoury goat stew.

"You'll be over it by tonight," the island priest predicted sympathetically. "The old boy's foot on top of too much sun, that's what did it. Eat," he commanded, piling the other's plate high.

There was no comfort in knowing that the great man had not yet heard the whispers. In a place like this he would be aware of them soon enough.

Father André tried to take a nap and could not, though it was the custom even in the capital to rest after the midday meal, and the healthy snores of Father Justin in the adjoining room shook the green-painted partition. Was he making too much of what he had heard? That imagination of his so often projected him into needless anxieties! He read for a time, and then crept down the stairs, and crossed the empty yard to the road.

It was not a road, really. There were only paths on the island. But this was a wide path curving through the village, bordered by the peasants' white houses leaning under sun-browned caps of thatch. A woman with a basket of yams on her head spoke when he spoke to her, not before. People in doorways stared.

They know, he thought. Already they know.

At supper Father Justin said, "You went for a walk this afternoon, eh?"

"Through the village."

"I meant to warn you: when you're away from the house, don't accept any gifts of food. On Sundays, when you visit the chapels, you'll take your own food and water with you." The

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large mouth, made for humour, was not smiling now but drawn thin. " I thought we were finished with voodoo here when their leading *hungan* died a while back, but I was mistaken."

" Voodoo? " Young Father André did not try to veil his astonishment.

" In the capital it's for tourists, eh? Back-country voodoo is different, believe me. When I came here, a wily old fellow named Salmador had the people in the palm of his hand. I fought him and he fought me back. When he poisoned people with his filthy home-brewed medicines, I cured them. When he scared them out of their wits with his threats, I took them in. You knew Father Lamarre was ill when he left here? "

Father André nodded.

" He was poisoned. Don't look so startled. He came back from the South Chapel one Sunday evening, complaining of a stomach-ache. I was expected at the chapel that day but had to stay here at the dispensary. The food he ate had been prepared for me."

The tall priest leaned back, hands locked behind his head, and now a look of sadness softened his craggy face. " Some native weed or root, I suppose. I don't know. All I know is that I wasn't able to cure him. Perhaps the doctors in the capital will have better luck."

" This Salmador is dead now? "

"And I was hoping the voodoo had died with him. The ugly side of it, that is—I've nothing against their simple folk-lore. What I'm after is this rotten business of a *hungan* filling his pockets by preying on their fears."

" How do you know it has come alive again? "

" The fellow with the foot this morning. He couldn't pay the usual few cents for treatment—said he'd given all he had, more than fifty dollars, to a *hungan*. He wouldn't name the *hungan*. Afraid to. Might put a spell on him or his family." Father Justin's fingers snapped the burnt match into fragments. " Might poison him is what it amounts to. So be careful, as I've warned you. No food on the road. Remember Father Lamarre."

Father André was caught in a whirlpool of emotions, scarcely aware that his companion had left the table. What manner of man had he come to live with? The pictures of the day floated through his mind: Father Justin operating on the monstrous foot; Father Justin smoking cigarettes and gaily mixing cocktails; Father Justin striding along to the church with a big-eyed native child perched proudly on each broad shoulder.

Now, climbing the stairs, Father André discovered still another picture of the elder priest to add to his perplexing collection: a

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tall, gaunt man with bowed head and clasped hands slowly paced the long verandah towards him—would have walked into him, unseeing, if Father André had not quickly stepped aside. No cigarette drooped from the man's lips now; they moved, but silently.

This, too, was Father Justin.

The island priest adjusted the stirrups for Father André and gave the neck of the grey horse an affectionate pat. "The cliff will give you the willies at first glance," Father Justin said, "but after you've been down it once you won't think it dangerous. Pierre will show you the way."

The sun had just cleared the jagged crest of the ridge, its copper glow splashing like molten metal against the white spire of the church. Cook, housekeeper, and the flock of small children who lived at the rectory chanted good-bye to the new Father off on his first Sunday journey.

With his ten-year-old guide shuffling ahead on bare feet, Father André rode slowly through the village, welcoming the peaceful hush. Again he was imagining things: the cliff he would have to descend, the reception he would get at the chapel from people who had never seen him before. He wished he could concentrate on the here and now, instead of struggling to anticipate, but the habit was too firmly fixed.

Last night, producing a rough map of the island, Father Justin had pointed out the route. "South Chapel is on the channel shore, here, three miles west of where the boat landed you. Trouble is, if you go down the trail to the cove and then along the shore, you'll run into mangrove swamps. So we always go west along the ridge and down the cliff." His fingers traced the trail. "The horse won't be able to manage the cliff, of course. Leave him at the top. You won't have far to walk."

Beyond the village, Father André hitched his cassock up to allow his legs more freedom, and began to feel a bit more at ease. His progress now was noted. People appeared in hut doorways, some to murmur polite greetings, others to stare. He guessed their thoughts. The young Father was on his own again, plucked by duty from the shelter of the rectory. What would happen this time?

Nothing, if he could help it.

The path branched, falling steeply through a gullied field. Rains had eaten through the red earth here; presently the trail became a ladder of boulders, and the horse placed his feet with care. From a nearby hut a man stepped into the sunlight and sang out a friendly greeting. Father André turned his head.

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A wail of terror whipped his attention back to the trail. The slope was in motion, boulders clattering into the massed trees below. His ten-year-old guide was down, and sliding in a rush of rubble.

The man in the hut doorway sprang into a lope before Father André was free of the stirrups. A big man with a tremendous stride, he covered the rocky ground in seconds and was breathing over the priest's shoulder as Father André knelt at the boy's side. The lad babbled in patois, clutching his ankle.

"Let me look, Pierre." Anxiously Father André prized the boy's small hands apart and examined the thin bare leg. He saw no bruise, no break in the skin, but his cautious probing brought new yelps of anguish.

Muscled arms reached past his shoulder. "Let me take him to the house, Father. My woman will know what to do for him."

Startled, Father André turned his head. He was not mistaken; the face was the one he had seen through the whirling pin-wheels. "Jumelle! Again!"

"The hand of God must be in it." Jumelle's grin was a cavern full of teeth. "When you have trouble, I am always at hand, eh? Don't worry. If the boy is hurt, Jumelle will guide you."

There was little wrong with the lad, Father André decided, but perhaps it was better this way, with the cliff yet to be conquered. "I'll pick him up on the way back," he told the woman. "Or if he seems in pain, you can carry him to the rectory. Ready, Jumelle? We mustn't be late."

"You go to the South Chapel?" Jumelle asked.

"Yes."

He rode again, with Jumelle gliding ahead on foot through the jungle twilight—a giant of a man, cat-quiet and tireless. The trail worsened. Frogs *car-r-racked* in slime-covered pools and land crabs fled the horse's feet. When the sunlight vanished, the trail was no trail at all. Even with Jumelle's big hand on the bridle, the horse seemed uncertain.

In the gloom of the forest the native halted. "From here you must walk." Hand on saddle, he helped Father André dismount, and then flipped the reins over the horse's head and made them fast to a sapling. "You have been told about the cliff, Father?"

"I know about it."

"It is nothing. We all use it, even the women and children. This way."

A towering tree with fat, crawling roots leaned over the edge in naked sunlight, and lianas thick as a man's arm dropped like weathered ropes down the face of the precipice. Father André

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looked down, clenched his hands in a spasm of terror and abruptly stepped back.

Jumelle, poised on the brink with bare toes gripping the ground, and arms folded on massive chest, smiled at him quizzically. "You are afraid?"

"No!" Father André forced himself to the edge again, made himself stand there, clutching the bole of the tree. Below him, the clustered huts of the chapel village were toys, and the trails through the jungle were strands of spectral cobwebs.

"I will show you." With a shrug, Jumelle gripped a naked root and slithered over the edge, sought other roots with his curling feet, shifted one hand to a liana, and felt his way down the cliff face like a great spider creeping down a wall. "You see?" Balanced on a ledge twenty feet below the rim, he looked up. "It is easy!"

Hot sickness settled in Father André's stomach, draining away his resolution like a sponge. His tongue felt his lips and found them dry. Even looking down at the upturned face of his guide made him dizzy. "I can't—I can't do it, Jumelle!"

"But everyone does it!" Jumelle in his impatience spoke harshly.

Everyone does it. Father Justin, the natives, the women and children. Ten-year-old Pierre would have done it. Father Lamarre, even when sick, must have done it.

Father André inched to the edge and knelt to grip a root, as Jumelle had shown him. He dangled in space. Then his foot, frantically seeking a resting-place, dislodged a fragment of rock, and in his imagination the rock was himself tumbling to destruction. He began to sweat and his teeth chattered, and with the last of his ebbing strength he was just able to pull himself back up.

"I can't!"

"Father!" The voice was patient again. "It is not difficult. Watch me."

But it *was* difficult, even for Jumelle. There were moments when only the ends of his powerful fingers supported him, while his toes felt their way along ribbon-narrow ledges. Yet, incredibly, he was halfway to the bottom, peering up again.

"Now, Father?"

"No." He sobbed the word.

"Then shall I go to the chapel and tell them you will not be coming?"

"Yes. Tell them." He could look no longer. It frightened him even to watch another take such risks. He turned away . . .

At the house, Jumelle's woman informed Father André that Pierre had gone home. He scarcely heard. The question in her

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eyes was louder—Why have *you* come back, Father?—and there was need to get away quickly before she could put it into words.

But he could not flee from Father Justin. The island priest, garbed for Mass, strode the length of the rectory yard to help Father André dismount.

"I could not go down the cliff. I was afraid." With head bowed, gaze fixed on the dusty shoes beneath the great man's cassock, Father André confessed his cowardice. When he lifted his head he saw that the cook had come from her kitchen to listen.

His face a thundercloud, Father Justin wheeled round to face the cook. "Is Pierre here?"

"I have not seen him, Father."

"When he comes, I want to talk to him." The blue eyes studied Father André's face. "Now, tell me—"

Beside the church a small boy tugged on a rope, and the ringing of a bell boomed over the village. The great man shrugged. "Time for Mass. We'll talk about this later, eh?"

Talk about what, Father André wondered, waiting in his room afterwards. Was there anything to say? He had asked to be sent here to the island; now he must beg to be excused. "I was no good there. In fairness to Father Justin I could not stay. How long would they admire *him* if he were burdened with a man they despised?"

Heavy feet trod the verandah, and Father André stood up, steeling himself for the ordeal. The great man halted in the doorway. "You'd better have dinner without me. Some fellow at the end of the island has chopped his leg with a machete."

"Can I—can I help?"

"It's a hard ride when you're not used to it. I'll do better alone."

Father André went down to dinner because it was expected of him, but the chicken was sawdust and the silence in the yard plucked at his nerves. Returning to his room, he lay on the bed. He felt washed out and yearned for sleep, but in an hour he was up again, pacing the verandah.

At four, remembering an obligation, he descended to the yard and sought out the cook. "The lad who went with me this morning, Marie—have you seen him?"

"No, Father."

"He lives here?"

"No, he only works here. But he is not at home. I sent someone an hour ago."

In the empty church, Father André tried for a time, unsuccess-

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fully, to shut his mind to what had happened. When he came out the sun was low in a fiery sky. Darkness crept up the ridges, and still Father Justin had not come.

Father André went to bed that night exhausted, but not to sleep. He heard the horse come into the yard at midnight, and Father Justin speaking to the servants who had waited up. He heard the priest's heavy footsteps on stairs and verandah.

Now he will talk to me, Father André thought. But the great man went to his own room, and presently the bed creaked and his snores were audible through the partition.

This way is better, Father André thought. He would be unhappy, saying what has to be said. Yet the young priest was disappointed. To leave without even a farewell . . .

He went to sleep with his mind fixed on five o'clock, and at four-thirty was wide awake, straining to see the hands of his watch. His small suitcase was already packed. It took only a few moments to dress, even in the dark.

At the door of Father Justin's room he paused to listen to the priest's snores, now gentle as a light breeze rustling palm leaves. Then he crept down the stairs, and across the dark yard. The trail he followed was the one that had beaten him on the day of his arrival.

It was not hard, going down. Dawn found him halfway to the shore, and he saw with relief that there were fishing-boats at anchor in the cove. Their owners lived in the huts strung along the beach. He would have no trouble getting across to the mainland. Clambering down over naked rocks, he passed the spot where big, kindly Jumelle had found him asleep in the sun. He trudged on.

On the beach, a man mending a net rose to confront him. "You go to the chapel, Father? It is difficult through the mangroves. I can show you the way."

Father André frowned at him — an oldish man, barefoot, with only ragged trousers between him and nakedness. "Why should I go to the chapel?"

"Why? To see Jumelle. He may be dying."

"What are you talking about?"

The man scratched at his jaw, then took a backward step and spoke rapidly, waving his hands. "You did not see it happen? He fell from the cliff yesterday and was hurt. Badly hurt. He crawled to a house in the chapel village. He is in great pain!"

"Fell from the cliff?" Father André lifted his head to gaze at the wall of rock looming between the sea and the crown of the island. "Why wasn't Father Justin sent for?"

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"Jumelle would not permit it."

"Not permit it? Take me to him!"

He had seen that trail from the cliff-top, a strand of spider-web drawn through jungle and morass. In the dim morning light it was a nightmare of wet roots and festering pools, and without the old man to show him the pitfalls he almost certainly would have foundered. The sweat came out on him before he had gone a mile; at the end of two he was winded and staggering. Then the sun burnt down to spin the red and yellow pinwheels before his eyes again.

But the swamps were behind at last. On the heels of his guide, he stumbled through taro gardens towards the white cross on the South Chapel, shining boldly above clustered roofs of thatch. In a small, dark hut nearby he knelt on a mat, peering into the pleasant-ugly countenance of Jumelle, twisted now with pain.

"Where are you hurt, Jumelle?"

"Here. Inside." His huge fingers crept spiderlike over his stomach.

"We'll get you to the dispensary. Father Justin—"

"No, no! It hurts me to move."

"Then I'll bring him here."

"I will not have him!"

"Don't be foolish." Ignoring a frantically clutching hand, Father André rose and confronted the old fisherman. "Is there a horse to be had? On foot it will take too long."

"There are no horses on the island, except at the rectory."

Jumelle was up on one elbow, gasping. "I will not have Father Justin! I will not!"

"Be quiet, Jumelle." Father André pressed the big shoulders back on the mat and held them a moment. "Rest now. I'll be back before you know it." Anxiously he stepped from the hut and looked towards the cliff.

He had feared the cliff before. He feared it now. But there was no other way. To return through the mangroves would take too long, and he knew what the trail up the mountain would do to him. This time there would be no Jumelle to carry him.

The villagers, gathered outside the hut, parted in silence to let him through. There was only one path leading towards the cliff. He followed it, his muddy cassock flapping against his legs as he lengthened his stride.

Near the base of the cliff he turned off. The path ran to the left, but the place where Jumelle had descended was ahead, clearly marked at the top by the leaning tree with its cascade of roots

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and lianas. Odd, the way his imagination worked now. He did not see himself as a fly on the wall, painfully struggling upward, losing his grip, and hurtling to his death. He saw the face of Jumelle contorted with agony and the great frightened eyes watching an empty doorway, praying for his return.

His hands shook only a little as he stripped off his cassock. A quick glance upward told him the way he must go. He climbed . . .

If only I had Jumelle's strong hands, he thought. His own were soft and tender, and the rock rubbed them raw. Pain bit like a knife blade into one shoulder; every upward reach twisted the knife. Once, halfway up, a shelf of stone crumbled under one foot and he dangled, momentarily paralysed. But he did not look down until the foot had found a resting-place and the danger had passed.

When he did look he saw the roofs of the village, and the white cross gleaming, the peasants standing in the open square before the chapel, watching him. But his mind saw only a hurt man waiting for help. At the top he heard faint shouts of approbation from the village watchers but plunged on through the jungle without a backward glance. He felt no triumph himself, only an urge to hurry and a dread that haste would devour too much of his strength. He ran and lost his wind, walked to rest himself, compromised finally on a trot that carried him all the way to the rectory.

Father Justin met him on the stairs. "I've got people out looking for you. Where the devil have you been?"

"With Jumelle." He told what had happened, and the island priest listened in mute astonishment. His strong fingers gripped Father André's arms and his searching eyes stared at him.

"You've had a time of it. Better get some rest."

"I want to go back with you."

The great man hesitated, then shouted for horses.

The whole village knew something had happened and watched them go. Father Justin set a furious pace, and there were times when young Father André thought his own horse would plunge out from under him. Still, he kept up. And he knew the way now. When the island priest took a wrong turn in the jungle near the cliff, Father André saw the error instantly.

"Not that way, Father! Here, to the left!" He pointed and pushed on. The leaning tree at the cliff-top was in front of him when he dismounted.

The older man, swinging from the saddle, stepped past him and looked down for a long moment in silence. "This is where you came up?"

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"Yes. Of course."

"And this is where Jumelle wanted you to descend? Where he went down himself, and fell?"

"Yes. What's wrong?"

The great man let his breath out slowly. "Now I know. I suspected it when the whole island learnt so soon that you were ill on the boat and he had to carry you up the mountain. And again yesterday when Pierre so mysteriously vanished. You think this is the cliff path? I wouldn't go down it with the devil himself on my tail!"

"But Jumelle—"

"He thought the reward would be worth the gamble, no doubt. Come along! I want to talk to that man!"

Young Father André had to mount quickly or be left behind, and presently there was a trail again, twisting along the cliff-top. For five minutes they followed it; then the horses halted without a command.

"There. You see?"

Father André stepped to the edge. The chapel village on the shore was hidden by an overhang, but the trail down the cliff was clearly visible: a much-used footpath, safe as a road. He glanced in bewilderment at his companion and saw anger on Father Justin's face. Without comment, the island priest strode down the path.

At the great man's heels, Father André entered the hut where Jumelle lay moaning, while the villagers crowded the doorway. Father Justin stepped to the mat and looked down.

"Leave me alone," Jumelle rumbled.

Father Justin dropped to one knee and placed his hands on the man's ribs. His fingers probed over chest and stomach. He rose again. "With God's help, I may be able to put you together again. Not that you deserve it."

"Leave me alone!"

"If I leave you alone, you'll die. Your voodoo won't save you."

"There's nothing wrong with me!"

"As you wish." Shrugging, the priest turned his back and went to the door. "I'll be in the chapel. But not for long, I warn you. I'm needed at the dispensary."

The villagers made way for him. He strode through the sunlight towards the small trim structure with the white cross shining above its entrance, and Father André followed. The village held its breath.

Inside the chapel the priest knelt, and young Father André

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knelt with him, understanding it all now, aware of the nature of the challenge.

Not for a moment did he believe that the great man, with his knowledge of medicine, would deny help to his enemy, even if Jumelle refused to surrender. But if the *hungan* begged for help in the house of God, with an entire village witnessing his capitulation, the battle was won.

The moments passed. Father André counted them by the throbbing in his chest and the ache in his knees.

When the waiting became agony he glanced at his companion, but the eyes of the island priest were closed and his face was expressionless.

From the doorway a timid voice came through the stillness: "Father. Father Justin. He asks for you."

The priest rose from his knees. "Come and lend a hand," he said quietly to Father André. "I suspect these people have a great deal of respect for you."

"For *me*?"

With an arm around Father André's shoulders, the doctor-priest paused in the door and nodded. "Jumelle most of all. He did his best to turn them against you. You beat him at his own game without even knowing it was a contest."

★ ★ ★

STRINGING ALONG

Also present the night Segovia came to dinner was Max Gordon, who had never heard of Segovia before he was introduced to him. He couldn't quite figure out how Segovia earned a living with just a guitar, and immediately started grilling him on the subject.

"Well, it is very simple," said Segovia, making one of the great understatements of all time. "I just sit on the stage and play Bach and Beethoven on my guitar, and people pay to come in and hear me play."

"But where do you play?" persisted Gordon. "How many people want to hear that long-haired stuff?"

"I keep busy," said Segovia. "One night I maybe play at Carnegie Hall, another night at the Paris Conservatoire, another night in Leipzig, and another night at the Royal Albert Hall in London."

Gordon thought it over for a moment, then turned to Groucho and exclaimed, "My God, Marx—it's just one-night stands with a banjo!"

ARTHUR MARX, *Groucho*

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SAMURAI SWORD

BY CELSO CARUNUNGAN

Born with printer's ink in his bloodstream, Celso Carunungan, son of a publisher in San Pablo City in the Philippines, won a short story competition while still at university in Manila. On reaching New York in 1949, his writing found a wider audience, and he is now at work on a historical novel with the appetizing title, "The Heart is a Grain of Rice."

With this unusual little story, a striking new talent makes its bow to Argosy readers.

AT that time, 1944, the Japanese were strong and hard in the Philippines, and in my town every boy's dream was to own a stolen Japanese samurai sword. To us Filipinos, possession of one such sword was a sign of bravery and patriotism. And I was no exception. It was what I desired most in the world.

One night, I dreamt of rows and rows of dead Japanese soldiers with eyes closed, mouths open, and bodies smeared with bloodstains. I had a great time taking their swords and swishing them in the air. Each time they flashed under the hot noon sun, I would shout with joy. It was a wonderful dream.

This was before Linda came to visit us. Linda was my cousin who came from Manila and whose father died in his sleep. She had lived in Manila nearly all her life, and from the way she danced and talked and moved, she must have been having a rich life. All the people in our house were excited when she came. It was her first visit since the start of the war.

She had a lot of glittering things around her neck, her wrists, and her fingers. Her dress was short and red and very tight. When Uncle Ciano saw her, he stared long and said, "Ah!"

Aunt Clara stared at her, too; but she said, "Bah!"

Father merely laughed quietly, while Mother went on with her cooking.

Ours was just a little town—about thirty grass-and-bamboo houses, and one built of wood and fastened by steel nails. They were all under tall, slender coconut trees. During the monsoon

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season, when the winds from the China seas were angry and the rains poured down as if the Malamig falls were upon us, the coconut trees protected us, and we liked the swishing sound of the wind-tossed leaves and fell asleep to it.

I was thirteen then, and my Father and Mother worked in the coconut plantation owned by the wealthy Spaniard whose wife and children were thin and pale and seldom laughed. They used to live in the city, but when the bombs started to fall there they moved into our town and stayed in the wooden house with the steel nails. My sister Maria wove beautiful mats for them.

My Uncle Ciano and Aunt Clara stayed with us, too. They have no children and Father was glad about that. Father had eight already and Mother was still very active and strong. She could carry a sack of rice without trouble.

Our house was small and we slept on dried palm-leaf mats laid on the floor made of stripped bamboos set half an inch apart. This made the house pleasant in summer when the fresh air came in not only through the windows but also from the spaces between the bamboos on the floor. Mother was especially fond of the spaces, because when we were still infants it helped her solve our individual bed problems.

When Linda came for the visit, she complained of the palm-leaf mats and the hard bamboo floor. She said that she wouldn't be able to sleep on it, because in the city she had a soft bed with cushions. What a wonderful place the city must be, I thought. We used cushions only in church for the wedding pair to kneel upon, and only if they could afford to pay the extra fee to the priest.

Father and Uncle Ciano made her a *papag*, a bed with coconut-trunk posts and rattan strips, on top of which they placed soft banana leaves covered by a white sheet. It was a comfortable bed, and the last time I could remember when Father made one like it was when my eldest sister got married and the couple used it on their wedding night.

"I wish that you would not go to so much trouble for little me," said Linda, when the bed was almost finished.

That night the leaves under Linda's bed made funny sounds each time she moved in her sleep. I could hear Uncle Ciano laughing quietly beside me. He laughed also the first night my sister got married. But I started to think about how wonderful the city must be, and my heart beat very fast as I imagined the way people slept there. I felt, for the first time in my life, that the bamboo floor was hard to sleep on.

At breakfast the next morning, Linda said, "In the city, money is very easy to get." She looked and smiled at my

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unmarried sister Maria, and then continued, "But only if you know how."

Linda was like a calendar picture when she smiled. Her lips were very red, not from chewing betel-nuts like Aunt Clara, but from a kind of shiny paint. She had curly hair, cut short almost like a man's. And I wondered what she would do if she bathed in the river, like the other girls in my town, who covered their bodies with their thick, long hair when they came out of the water to dress.

She opened her brown trunk and showed her new dresses to all of us. We all crowded in the middle of the room where we slept at nights. We looked at the clothes, wide-eyed. They were shiny new things, some red, some black, some with glittering things. My sister Maria looked ardently at them, the way she looked at my eldest sister's wedding-dress on the day she got married.

Mother and Aunt Clara looked hard at Father and Uncle Ciano instead of at the dresses.

Then I saw a varnished wooden square box with a handle and a dog painted on the top. "What is this?" I asked Linda, lifting it.

"Careful, boy," she said, moving to my side. "That's a phonograph." She opened the box, placed a thin black plate on it, and wound it with the handle on the side. The sounds came, slowly at first, then faster and faster till it was very exciting to hear. *Yes, we have no bananas*, it said.

It was a fascinating thing. It was like the city—fast, exciting, new. After a time, the disk stopped whirling and Linda put on a new one. This time, the music was slow and sweet, almost dreamy. *Oh, dream of love*, it said. It was like the swishing of the coconut leaves during the monsoon nights. It almost lulled me to sleep. I forgot about the samurai swords gleaming in the sun. They were nothing compared to this. In that very moment, all I wished for in the whole world was a black, whirling disk in a square music box.

That night, I heard Linda talking very seriously with my sister Maria. They were under the house and I could hear their voices through the spaces on the floor.

"You see," Linda said, "I came here to help you, cousin. You can have lovely things like I have if you would go to Manila with me. This town is not the place for a young girl like you. You are pretty, Maria . . ."

Maria said nothing. She looked at Linda as if she was a hungry child who wanted to cry for food, but couldn't.

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"I will talk to your mother about this," Linda said. Then they went up to the house and proceeded to the kitchen where Mother was boiling some sweet potatoes.

I stood up to meet them and said excitedly, "Cousin Linda, how much is a music box?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "Must be very expensive. It was given to me."

As they entered the kitchen, Maria closed the bamboo door and I couldn't follow them. So I ran downstairs and listened through the spaces on the floor right below the kitchen.

"Aunt," Linda said, "how would you like to let Maria go with me to Manila?"

She had a very sweet voice. It was like the voice of Aling Petra who sang in church at weddings and special funerals.

"What is it, Linda?" Mother said, and her voice was husky, but soft and warm. It was the kind of voice you would love to hear when you couldn't sleep at night.

"I said, Maria could make better money in Manila, Auntie. She will make more money in a day with me than she would in a month weaving mats."

"She does not know anything but weaving mats, Linda," Mother said.

"That's all right, she'll learn. I'll teach her."

Mother did not answer her any more, and when Father came home that evening from the plantation, they talked about it as they lay on the palm-leaf mat. Father thought that Maria could go if she wanted to. After all, it might help in the family finances.

"Remember that nowadays the order for mats that she gets is not much," Father explained.

Mother merely sighed.

At lunch-time the next day, Linda said that I could have the music box if I would accompany my sister to the city. Mother would not let Maria go to the city alone.

"She's only nineteen," said Mother, wiping her eyes with the hem of her skirt. "She's never been to the city before."

"She has to finish the big mat for the Spaniard," said Aunt Clara.

Maria looked at Aunt Clara, then at Mother, then at Linda. All three were eating quietly. There was no loud, happy conversation as we used to have. Finally, Father rose up, looked at Mother, and said in his rough, loud voice, "The rice is good. The fish is good. Ah, I ate so much!" Then when he was at the water-jar, he turned to Maria and said, "Maria, you'd better work faster on the Spaniard's mat if you want to go with Linda right away."

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"I will wait for her to finish the mat," said Linda. Mother left the table and went to the kitchen. Aunt Clara followed her. Then they talked between themselves.

Linda came over to my side and smiled and said, "When we get to Manila, I'll give you some more disks to play on the phonograph." Then she patted me on the head and I felt fine. I felt as if I was at the top of the tallest coconut tree.

In two days the mat was done. It was a beautiful mat with red and white and blue designs. The Spaniard paid Maria more than enough to pay for our trip to the city.

When we were about to leave, Mother and Aunt Clara cried in the kitchen. Father and Uncle Ciano talked with me under the house. I wore my new white shirt, my new red shorts, and my wide-brimmed straw hat. I wore my black shoes, which I wore only at weddings and funerals and when I served in church.

"Be a good boy, huh?" Father said.

"Watch Maria very well, huh?" Uncle Ciano said.

"Yes, Father. Yes, Uncle," I answered. But I was thinking of the music box.

Then all was ready and Maria and I jumped into the cart that we used in taking coconuts to the river. Uncle Ciano beat the *carabao*, our water-buffalo, and we moved sluggishly until we reached the station. We ate in the cart and waited for the train.

The train came and Maria took me by the hand. Mother and Aunt Clara kissed me and Maria, but Linda kissed Father and Uncle Ciano. There were red lip-marks left on the faces of both Father and Uncle.

From the window of the train, I saw Mother and Aunt Clara pointing angrily at the marks. Linda saw them, too, and she laughed very loud.

We reached Manila before sunset. There were many people and they were very noisy. It was like a special cock-fighting fiesta in my town. Only there was no crowing of the cocks and I did not know anybody. Outside, there were thousands of lights and still more people. I did not know where to look. Linda called for an automobile and we all got in.

"This is a taxi," Linda said like a teacher giving her first lesson.

"Uhuh," I said. I did not know what she meant.

The car moved fast and so did the people on the streets. It was all so exciting, like floating downstream on a bamboo raft during the great floods.

Linda's house was a great wooden building with stone steps and pink curtains. The windows were decorated with mother-

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of-pearl shells. The floor was of shiny boards and there were no spaces between them. It was so clean you would need no plates to eat on it.

Kulasa, Linda's servant, served the dinner. The room was warm and we wiped the perspiration off our faces. But Maria said, "Don't you feel cold?" I laughed and thought that she was being funny.

After dinner, Linda told Maria that she was expecting guests that night. And Maria must dress well.

"I wrote to them that we were coming tonight," Linda said.

"I haven't got a thing to wear," Maria said shyly.

"I'll lend you one of mine for tonight," Linda said, smiling. Maria did not answer.

Linda helped Maria put on her dress, while I went into the living-room to play with the music box. *Yes, we have no bananas*, it said, and my heart was filled with joy. I was now in the city.

"This is too short for me," said Maria as they came out of the room.

"Nonsense, it's just right," said Linda. "My friends—*our* friends—will like you in it."

Then Linda dabbed some paint on Maria's cheeks and fixed her hair before the huge mirror, and soon Maria was like a calendar picture herself.

The living-room was large, and the chairs were so soft that a hen could lay an egg on them. As we waited for the guests, Linda placed more disks on the phonograph. She was very happy.

She danced to the music all by herself and sang, "*When the deep purple falls . . .*" and smiled at us.

"You are pretty, Maria," she said finally. "Very pretty."

Maria said nothing. She just smiled sheepishly. That was her kind of smile when the parish priest in our town told her that she was growing to be a real lady.

It was wonderful—the music, the house, the city. It was even better than living in the Spaniard's house with steel nails. Or having a hundred samurai swords.

The guests arrived at ten o'clock. All of them were Japanese officers. They dragged their feet as they walked, and their shoes made hollow sounds as if they were too big for them. One of them had four watches on his left wrist.

I saw their long swords dangling from their hips, and my old yearning for such a sword nearly returned, but the music box was playing *Yes, we have no bananas* again, and it was so exciting, and I thought—what a wonderful place the city is!

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They all sat down on the soft chairs and Linda smiled sweetly at them. She said, "This is my pretty cousin I was telling you about." Then she held Maria's shoulders.

One of the officers pulled a chair near Maria. "You are very pretty girru," he said. He smiled and two gold teeth flashed.

Maria said nothing. She just twisted and twisted her handkerchief round her fingers.

"Dat dress you wear, I gave dat to Rinda," he said. "She is good girru. I rike her company very much."

Maria still said nothing. She looked at Linda, then at me, and she was like a sheep tied to be killed. The music box was still playing. *Yes, we have no bananas*, it said.

"If you are good to me, I wir give you some pretty dresses, too. You are very beautifur girru, Maria."

Maria kept on twisting and twisting the handkerchief, first round one finger, then round another.

"She is very bashful," Linda said. "She is very new to the city."

The Japanese rose from his chair and went nearer to Maria. Then he stroked Maria's hair. "Nice girru, Maria. I gave Rinda pretty nice things. I gave Rinda phonograph. I wir give same to you."

Linda laughed very loud, and it was not nice to hear. "You're very enjoyable, Captain Uewaki," she said. The music box was still going on.

Then he tried to stroke Maria's cheeks, but like a sheep that was suddenly set free, she jumped from her chair and rushed to Linda and cried, "Linda, I—I am going home!"

"You're crazy, Maria! Now is your chance. He'll give you anything you want, if you'll be good to him. Look at me. Look at my house. Be sensible, Maria. You have attracted him already. Go to him, please, Maria."

But Maria said nothing. Tears were glistening on her cheeks, making awful paths in the powder and paint on her face. She looked like a muddy rice-field. She came to me and held me by the hand, and they were cold and nervous hands.

"Let's go, boy. Let's go!" she said. "Let's go home."

The music box was still playing as I stood up and went with her to the door. The Japanese officer followed us. Linda also ran after us.

"Maria! Maria!" she shouted. "You're a crazy girl. Crazy girl!"

But we did not listen to her. We did not turn back. We ran down the stone steps fast. I could hear the loud voices of the Japanese officers talking to Linda as we were running away to

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the dark city streets. I could hear also Linda's voice shouting back at the officers. And as I was thinking how foolish I was not to have pulled one of the officer's swords before we ran away, I heard the music box still playing the same tune. But this time, it was a terrible, broken sound that went over and over again. *Yes, we have no ban . . .* it said. *Yes, we have no ban . . . Yes, we have no ban . . . Yes, we have no ban . . . Yes, we have no ban . . .*

★ ★ ★

ARRIVAL PLATFORM—

Incessancy of station bells,
Café au lait, nostalgic smells,
Laburnum woods, and a transmutation
Of earth and air, to the Esterels.

A breath of garlic, paddle-boats,
A sad alpaca taste in coats;
Sonorous speech from under poplars
Where Sunday fishermen watch their floats.

Against such spells, phylactery
Is found in these: a stretch of sea,
And cliffs of chalk, and on Dover platform
A porter proffering cups of tea.

L. E. JONES, *A La Carte*

—CONTINENTAL DEPARTURE

It was André de Noyelle who encountered a different trait in the British character: that of believing foreigners to be "capables de tout." André was staying with another Norfolk family, the Buxtons of Dunston. He had a migraine, and went up to his room to lie down. His hostess, when the shadows lengthened, sent a footman upstairs to ask whether André would like a cup of tea. André had just returned from Germany; half-awake, he imagined himself back there and drowsily murmured "Nein."

The footman retired, to return in ten minutes with a large tray on which were set out nine cups of tea. Would even the best-trained servant, bred in the belief that his not to reason why, have carried nine cups of tea to that darkened bedroom if an aching, but English, head had been laid upon the pillow? I doubt it. It was simply a case of humouring a member of an unaccountable race, with perhaps a sigh of relief that nine cups of tea and not nine frogs had been asked for.

L. E. JONES, *A Victorian Boyhood*

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TIP YOUR PLANET HERE

BY MARTIN JORDAN

"OH Sir Edward, what's the secret of success?" they used to ask, meaning, "How can I, too, make money?" As if they hadn't headpieces of their own.

Well, Universe, it's Ted Possum calling, and I hope you're listening—right down to the cosmic dust . . .

Rationalization, that's the answer. If you'd passed our building site in Oxford Street you'd have seen a board: SIR EDWARD POSSUM & CO., CONTRACTORS. Nice job, you might have thought, big contract—ah well, keeps money circulating. It does . . . among the Possum Group. For the host of subcontracting firms have names like these: Possum (Electrical) Ltd., The Possum Steel Constructional Co., Possumite Plastics Ltd., Pre-stress Possumcast Concrete Ltd., Possumglaze . . .

And if you'd delved deeper, you'd have found that the freeholders of the site were a firm called Possum Estates.

Another secret: streamlining costs. That, if I may stretch a point, started me off among the planets.

I was being driven along the Bayswater Road when I saw one of Burdett's five-tonners turn into Queensway. Burdett's were excavating a site in Baker Street. I caught myself wondering where their tip could be; we had to go all the way to the Uxbridge Road, beyond Ealing.

I called the car and got the chauffeur to take me near Lancaster Gate station and the Park. I got a ticket from a policeman; saw two of our trucks heading for Ealing; then along came one of Burdett's, and I told the chauffeur to trail it. We went up Queensway and into North Kensington, and there, in what writers call "a maze of side streets"—I haven't time to think up better phrases—I saw a smallish island site with a tall, close-boarded fence around it and a notice: FREE TIP.

There were double gates, and I saw the tail of Burdett's truck going in. I left the car and hopped after the truck through the mud.

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As soon as I got inside the gates I realized that something was wrong. I can't explain better. Nothing was wrong on the surface—nothing you could put your finger on, that is. But things have a habit of sticking to patterns, and this didn't. Like using a milk saucepan to fry an egg.

Inside the fence there was a strip of churned-up ground and then another fence, about twelve feet tall and made of tongued and grooved boards without a crack between them. Both outer and inner fences were circular, so the strip between them was a circle, too. I paced it and found it had a circumference of about a hundred and fifty yards and was roughly fifteen yards wide. There was nothing in this strip between the fences except a small hut, locked and shuttered.

But all that was discovered later; what interested me at first was the tube.

When I arrived between the fences I saw Burdett's truck backing into the only opening in that smooth inner wall. I saw its jacks working and heard the swoosh of the load sliding out. Then Burdett's truck went lurching away through the gate, and I heard it going down the road in first gear.

I had a look at the hole into which the load had been tipped. It was a round hole in the inner fence, about fifteen feet in diameter. It was the opening to a metal tube with a smooth interior and a gradient of perhaps one in four.

It was too dark to see right down the tube, but Burdett's load had already vanished, and I could see a sort of light at the end like the sun shining through a tank of tropical fish, with quite a number of the fish in residence.

I lit a cigarette, thinking: If Burdett can tip here, so can Possum. Just then someone else's truck arrived—Lampitt & Co.—backing gracefully into the opening of the tube and unloading . . .

I stayed for an hour. During that time, another contractor—McPherson—used the tip, and also an old man with a handcart.

Well, it was all very interesting, and I couldn't help wondering about the purpose of the tube and what went on at the other end. But the main thing was the free tip. It would save me a lot of dead mileage, and that was something you could put in the bank.

I turned away, hands in pockets, and my fingers closed on my jack-knife, which included a gimlet. I got to work on the inner fence, several yards from the tube, and bored a hole, and applied my eye. Nothing much. Just the side of the tube, naked and metallic.

It had got my curiosity working—a thing to which I'm prone. I told myself not to be a fool; reminded myself that people were

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using this free tip sensibly in quiet thankfulness; that the one time when curiosity was more than usually superfluous was when pennies were dropping from heaven.

But I wasn't really listening to myself, and I walked through the gate in the outer fence, crossed the road to a tobacconist, and asked the proprietor how long the free tip had been in operation. He told me lorries had been dumping stuff there for about five months.

"Thanks," I said, and went and sat in the car. I was making myself depressed with calculation. Five months—say a hundred days at two hundred tons a day. That was twenty thousand tons. The space hidden behind the inner circular wall was roughly sixteen thousand square feet. Where was the mountain of muck that should by rights be overtopping the fences—even the surrounding houses—and overflowing into the street?

Behind that fence, I told myself, must be a deep, deep hole . . .

I ordered the car back to Oxford Street and managed to shrug off the affair. A hole. So what? There were all sorts of shafts and deep shelters left over from the war. Maybe this was the local council's way of getting one of them filled in. It sounded reasonable.

As soon as I reached the Oxford Street site I told our manager to divert the trucks from Ealing, and gave him the position of the new tip. I told off one of the draughtsmen to spend a day up at the tip and write down the total tonnage of the users thereof. He was a good boy, and I believed him when he reported five hundred tons.

That made maybe fifty thousand tons in five months—the weight of a transatlantic liner. Some hole!

The draughtsman said, "It isn't a free tip any more, the notice has been taken down. But the gate's still open and Burdett's are sending stuff through."

"As long as Burdett does it, so will we," I said, "until somebody stops us." And I gave orders to the site manager.

But curiosity went on jogging like the nerve the doctor finds in your knee; only this was in my head. I fetched out a truck with a ten-foot ladder and drove it up to North Kensington myself, sixty-guinea suit, bow-tie, and all; thinking, to take my mind off the tip, that a small-town master builder couldn't have got away with his own lorry and ladder without arousing smirks and speculations, whilst Sir Edward Possum could do it without seeing one twitch on the faces of the men. That's something worth a chapter to my biographer.

I parked the truck between the fences. I'd forgotten the weight

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of a ladder; it took me ten man-minutes and a pound of sweat to get it into position. Then I climbed up and looked over the top of the inner wall.

There was not much of a hole. But as to *what* there was . . .

You've seen spoilt negatives? modern art? photos of ghosts taken at séances? It had that same blurriness about it, like a piece of the real world hacked out and a bit of crazy stuck in its place.

It was solid enough, a circular plot of muddy ground, shut in by the twelve-foot fence. The tube—a big cylinder of galvanized steel—fell to a depression in the middle. There it seemed to enter a door, or rather a door-frame, made of what looked like wire hawsers and china.

The tube did not come out of the door-frame. It was sliced off sharp at that point and refused to be examined. I mean, there was something of rainbows and prisms about it, and my eyes hurt.

I stayed up the ladder, shaking; and I had reason to because of a certainty that had sat squarely on my stomach. It was only a matter of time, and then the impossible would happen—something new to Ted Possum and not his element for swimming.

It happened. I waited five minutes—ten. Then one of McPherson's trucks arrived, ignoring like us the removal of the tipping notice. I heard it clawing up to the opening of the tube, I heard its jacks and the *swoosh* . . .

Five tons of dirt to slither down that tube.

I was staring, hypnotized, while the truck withdrew and grumbled away.

The shorn-off end of the tube went on glimmering and winking. Five tons in, and nothing out! If there were a hole or shaft down there it would be deep enough to rank as the eighth wonder of the world.

I stowed the ladder and drove home. I mean home. I shut myself in and started to wheedle indifference out of a bottle of whisky; but by the morning I was still simmering to get at the tube.

When I got back to the tip the outer gate was locked and there was a new notice: PERSONS DEPOSITING EARTH OR REFUSE WILL BE PROSECUTED. So the unlimited tipping had produced an embargo. Well, I'd known many drivers who would have ignored such a notice and hooked a summons.

I'm just telling you what I did. I hauled out the ladder and shinned up the fence.

It was a long drop the other side, and I couldn't take the ladder

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with me, which meant I couldn't get over the inner fence. I waded through the mud and stood at the entrance to the tube. I was still, in one respect, in an everyday ironmonger's world because the tube was ordinary galvanized iron, and bits of soft dirt from the tippings stuck to it. But there, away down the tube, was the abrupt termination, the bottle-green fish-tank effect, and the wavy motion like eels.

I might have stared for half an hour, frozen as a trout under a stern light, but at last I thought of the locked gate and I turned to it, hoping it could be unbolted from the inside. I was unlucky; it was a mortise lock. I started to fiddle with some of my spare keys, when I heard a cough, and turned round.

A man was standing behind me, dressed in a diver's outfit and carrying the fat, metallic helmet in his hands. There was nothing written on him, but I knew with diamond sureness that he had come walking out of the tube while my back was turned.

"How did you get in?" he asked, in a voice with a Yorkshire accent.

"Over the fence," I answered.

"This is private property. You just wait there and I'll get the key." And he plodded to the little hut between the fences. It was all ordinary; the Yorkshire accent seemed to neutralize the diving-suit and the thing down the tube.

In a short while he came back with a key. He said, "How did you get over?"

"Ladder."

"After—what?"

"This was a free tip."

"That's right. But not any more."

I said, "Where did the dirt go?"

"Behind that fence," he said. "A very deep hole."

"Yesterday I looked over that fence."

"Oh," he said, "a snooper."

"Where does it go—the stuff they tip?"

"It's . . . converted." He was holding wide the gate. I gave him my card, and he read it. He had a small pale face, with straight hair and eager cheekbones—a bread-and-cheese-for-supper face, and sweep-the-crumbs-under-the-bed.

"So you're Sir Edward Possum," he said. "My name's Huggett. You gave a lot of money to tracer research."

"Ten thousand pounds," I told him. "And it didn't seem to get results."

"How would you like to give me a thousand?"

"Depends."

"On the benefits I can offer humanity?"

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"Humanity or me," I smiled. "But I warn you, I take some pushing."

"Of course," he mused, "you've got your knighthood."

I didn't like that remark. Cynical. I said sarcastically, "They could always make me a baronet."

"That's true," he said gloomily. "Would you like to come into the office?"

I followed him into the hut. It was full of things I didn't recognize. I always think of a laboratory as a place full of test-tubes, but there weren't any here. There was a fuse-box as big as a telephone kiosk and another diving-suit pegged on the wall.

"Costs me thirty pounds a week for power," he said. "I'm through, unless . . ."

"Why the diving-suits?"

"They're spacesuits."

"But they haven't been invented!"

"By me they have."

"What's down that tube?"

He stood and stared, miles withdrawn, dangling his arms. "Nearly six months I've had folks tipping, and you're the first to ask a question."

"People aren't large-eyed about science any more," I told him. "They cringe and wait."

"It's something bigger than the wheel, the steam-engine, or the atomic bomb."

"All for a thousand?"

"Listen, *will* you give me a thousand?"

"I told you. Depends."

"I'll take you down there, then you will."

"Down the tube?"

"Yes, but it's a bit . . . surprising. You'll need a tot of brandy or something. You see, it's another world."

I looked at him warily. Was he slightly round the bend? "I'll risk the . . . surprise," I said.

He fetched down the second spacesuit, and I climbed into it. There was a business with oxygen packs; I felt claustrophobic for a panic second, and then calm. I followed him heavily to the opening of the tube.

I saw then that the fall of the tube was not steep enough to prevent people walking inside it. He stepped inside and I went after him. I had changed into metal-shod boots—part of the spacesuit—and they gripped the earthy surface well enough.

Gradually the daylight gave way to the fishglow, and at the same time, a sound grew that was not exactly loud but had so

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much subdued power that it appeared possessed of weight—I imagine as a turbo-jet might sound through twenty feet of cotton wool.

He stopped at the bottom of the tube, and I gaped over his shoulder at the curtain of light—or something—that I'd all along compared to a fish-tank. At close quarters it wasn't like that at all. I've written this so far with several references to what things were like, but the end of the tube was like nothing. The tube just stopped abruptly, but where you would expect to see a slope of earth and the inside of the fence beyond, there was nothing. It didn't even have a colour. Like water? No, not as colourful as water.

"Follow me," he said. "Don't hesitate. You'll feel a jolt. After that, don't move except slowly. You'll be weighing much less."

He stepped into the nothingness. For some reason I held my breath as I went after him.

I felt the jolt. Like? Again like nothing on earth. Not pain. Perhaps a kind of rearrangement. Chemical change? Imagine *conscious* chemicals and you've got it.

I took two steps and stopped. I was suddenly out of the tube, and I should have been standing on a small plot of fenced-in ground, North Kensington, London, at eleven o'clock in the morning. Instead, I was a living speck in an astronomer's universe. The sky was black. A sun burnt in it with the round stare of a single white-hot eye. Stars, as if thrown by a fountain and frozen, seemed to hang in mid leap up there, a billion billion droplets of light.

I looked behind me; the door through which I had come was a nothingness surrounded by a frame of coil and earthenware insulation. I looked at the ground, and it was London clay and rubbish—I even saw a half-buried iron bedstead. And then I looked at the horizon, and it was so near I fancied I could touch it with my toe.

I felt the other's hand on my arm; there was a clicking in my ears and his voice came, telling me how to operate what he called "the suit radio."

He led me like a blind man. I felt all the time we were walking down a steep hill, but my eyes told me there was no hill. Soon a homely and ridiculous thing shone palely in front of me against the background of unspeakable night—a trailer caravan!

"Here we are," he grunted. He helped me up two steps, pressing buttons . . .

I had heard of air-locks. "You see," he said, as he stood with

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me in a tiny cubby-hole and watched a pressure-gauge, " here's another thing that hasn't been invented." He patted me into the interior of the caravan, unscrewing his headpiece, peering right and left at dials. " It's amazingly small, the temperature range in which human life is possible. I'm dreaming up a shuttering system for this trailer. It's getting hotter in here every day."

I followed his example and got rid of the spacesuit, gawking around at the apparatus. " Where are we? "

He mumbled, tracing a pointer with his finger, " We're still in the good old cosmos. Does that make you feel cosy? But what if the cosmos contained an indefinite number of serial universes? What if the earth and solar system were only part of one of those universes? What if we, at present, were in a *different* universe? "

" We—we're not on the earth? "

" We're on a tiny, home-made asteroid, not near the earth, or far from it—simply not relevantly placed as regards the earth."

I remembered having read something similar. " A different dimension? "

" There's an up and a sideways wherever you are. I'll tell you roughly what's involved, or I shan't be getting that thousand pounds." I stared out of a window at the void while his Yorkshire voice went on as calm as cricket.

" It's like this. You know the set-up inside the atom? There's a nucleus. There's also one or more orbiting bodies.

" Atoms are so small, you couldn't count a thimbleful of them in a lifetime. Yet the space inside the atom is as vast as—" he waved at the window—" out there. On the scale of the solar system there's as much room inside the atom as there is between the earth and the sun. It's a question of point of view.

" Everyone's used to the idea of space—schoolboys think of the universe as St. Paul's Cathedral with an ounce of pepper floating inside it. But it's not like that at all—it's St. Paul's simply *packed* with pepper. The pepper-grains can't know each other because they're packed in such a way that no one grain touches any other grain. They're all mathematically on their own."

I pointed weakly at the window. " Mean to say, that's not our sun? "

" Nor yet our stars," he said.

" How do you do it? "

" Perhaps fifteen men are alive who might understand."

" Take me back, I'm scared," I said.

Ten minutes later we came climbing up the tube into North Kensington, London.

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"Mr. Huggett," I said, "have you plans? specifications?"

"All here in the hut."

"I'm going to give you two thousand."

"Thanks."

"I'll be back in the morning with a deed of partnership."

"Partnership?"

"Half shares."

"As long as I can carry on research," he said.

"That," I assured him, "will be your department."

We parted at the gates in the fence. I indicated the notice. "Why did you stop the tipping?"

"Perturbations."

These scientists! I got into my truck and drove off, forgetting the ladder. I could have forgotten my own head. It wasn't until I'd had several drinks that the events of the morning started to jell.

The position as I saw it was this. A man called Huggett had discovered an entrance into another sector of space. He had made his own world beyond that entrance by getting an unsuspecting lot of building contractors to use it as a free tip. All those tippers made for him a little planet, and by a coincidence, the path of that planet was the same as the orbit of the Earth. I, Ted Possum, was now about to acquire a half share in that planet —and in any others which Mr. Huggett, urged by Ted Possum and assisted by the tipping public, might make in future.

The possibilities—good commercial ones—began to form flawlessly as soon as my brain had recovered from the novelty. Science gets you nowhere if it isn't into the yacht-owning class.

First and foremost was the idea of land values. What about a planet off Fifth Avenue, New York? or for that matter, Oxford Street, London? Any place, in fact, where the land was worth its superficial area paved in gold. I saw those planets developed: a luxury hotel—The Cosmic?—rose in glittering and pressurized splendour; a vast department store, the alien stars glaring like magnesium through glassoid walls; an office block, remote as the Moon, yet having its entrance on Piccadilly . . .

I drew up the partnership agreement and typed it myself. Then drove myself up to North Kensington.

The outer gates were locked. I banged at them, hoping Huggett was inside and would hear. Noticing that the ladder still stood against the fence, I climbed up and dropped over near the entrance of the tube.

I noticed that the key was in the lock of the gates. I opened them and looked out into the street.

It occurred to me to try the hut, which I found open. One of

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the spacesuits was missing; the other hung on its peg. So Huggett was paying a call on the cosmos. Well, it would be more appropriate, somehow, to clinch our little deal on that other, that unrelated world.

Spacesuited, I stomped to the tube and went straight in. Only a faint tremor passed through me as I held my breath and butted past . . . *it*.

Then the lucid night of strange stars and the sun mounting high —that white sun that glared with such a foreign face. The familiar clay stuck to my boots. I kangarooed over the soil of that medicine-ball of a world, jigging eighteen inches above the surface with the momentum, and when I came to the trailer caravan, I kicked with my metal toe.

The air-lock hissed. Sixty seconds later I was inside with Huggett.

"Oh, it's you," he said.

Well, it wouldn't have been the Lord Mayor of London. He was abstracted—the steel table was littered with bits of squared paper, all obliterated with maths. I said, "How goes it?"

"Listen," he said, not looking at me, "there's a *Times* somewhere . . . Make yourself at home. I'm rather . . ."

Later he looked up and said, "These perturbations . . ."

"What *are* perturbations?"

"Disturbances," he said, "in the orbits of planets, caused by their mass. The present size of this one is critical. That's why I stopped the tipping."

"I don't quite get you," I said, and settled down with the newspaper. I wanted to fetch out the agreement and start talking. He went on figuring, and it was an hour by my watch before he looked up.

I was staring baffled at the crossword, and it was a moment before I realized that something had jogged the caravan.

It might have been a small earth tremor—that is, if we'd been on Earth.

Huggett was struggling with his helmet and suit. By the time I had dressed and got outside, he had vanished dolphinlike over the horizon. When I came up with him I could hear his breath crackling on my suit radio.

He didn't say anything. I looked where he was looking, and there was a thing in the sky, very far away—a sort of door-frame in cold mother-of-pearl, and through the door-frame dark rubble was still trickling to weave sluggish patterns against the darker sky.

"You . . ." he said at last, "you must have left the gate open!"

I remembered. Dumbly and miserably, I also remembered

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those orders I had given the site manager. "Go on tipping," I had said, "until somebody stops us."

Well, here we are, quite snug in the trailer, and Huggett is reeling off sheets of maths and I'm writing these memoirs. We've food and water for six months, but the air will go first. We both prefer it that way, if . . .

The door to North Kensington—and Bangkok—and Kabul—has vanished completely among the overbearing stars. I suppose they'll go on tipping through that door until there's another planet. And then someone might fall down the tube and find himself like us.

Huggett has a generator and some spares. He's trying to get together another door. He reckons to step into universe after universe until he finds somewhere solid and habitable. As if I wanted any place outside the West End.

How it all comes back to me! I mean, *Alice*. Used to read it when I was a nipper. Down . . . down . . . down. Curiouser and curiouser . . .

★ ★ ★

MELODY FOR LUTE AND OCARINA

Oh, pure is the poppy on the prairie,
And cheery the chipper chickadee,
And snug is the bug as it snuggles in a rug,
And solemn the sobbing of the sea;
And lush, love, is mush with molasses,
And honeyed the proboscis of the bee,
And dear is a steer to the farm overseer,
But dearer you are to me.

The clergyman cleaves to his cloister,
The gnat loves to gnaw at the gnu,
At Easter every feaster loves the hoister of the oyster,
The dewberry drinks in the dew;
The waxwork woos in the wardrobe
When the waxwork's week's work's through;
The male whale flails the female with his tail,
But, darling, I love you.

MORRIS BISHOP,
A Bowl of Bishop

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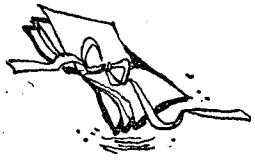
A Letter to my Love



I write to you! Is more required?
ALEXANDER PUSHKIN, *Eugene Onegin*

Goe, pale-fac't Paper, to my Deare,
And whisper this into her eare:
Though I absent am, yet shee
Keeping thee, embraces mee.
Let no rude hand dare to touch thee,
Care not though a thousand grutch thee
Of that blisse which in her Hive
Thou enjoy'st till I arrive,
And be sure thou dost not flye
From the glances of her eye.
Nor let any dare to see
What's between my Love and thee.
Nay, and when she chance to sleepe,
Gently to her Bosome creepe,
Where, I charge thee, rest till shee
With her kisses waken thee.
Goe and prosper for a space,
Till I rob thee of thy place.

JOHN TATHAM, *The Fancies' Theater*, 1640

Between the Lines

I read the whole letter over again, searching through every word, through the commonplaces, the information of the way he was living, the time, the weather—pushing it all aside like so much rubble. Now I would pick up a word or a phrase, as one fingers a pebble. But no. The repetition of "as I told you" seemed an intimacy, perhaps? Yes. Yes, that I could keep. The bit about his mother. This puzzled me. Of course, it could mean a special kind of confidence in me; of course.

Some sentences I read over to myself a dozen times. Aloud,

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they sounded different; with another intonation, the meaning changed. Every word of the letter seemed ambiguous; happiness came and went like the colour in the bird's wing, showing and going out as it falls through the sun.

I sat on my bed with the three thin sheets and envelope spread evidence about me. Well, I had a letter, anyway. I rested in that.

NADINE GORDIMER,
The Lying Days

Dead Letter

Against the window tapped the leaves,
along the grey roof ran the rain,
the hound beside the fire groaned,
the flames leaped up and died again.

The darkness pressed against the walls,
a cold wind nosed through the open door,
the letter moved like a wounded thing
and hurtled itself across the floor.

Where was the man who had read these words?
Where had he gone, leaving behind
his house a prey to the dripping woods,
the cold-nostrilled rain and the snuffing wind?

ELIZABETH COATSWORTH, *The Letter*

Pen Friend

Ida's reputation became so far-flung that she received love letters from people she did not even know. This one is a fair example:

Dear Unknown Friend: I came back to New York and thought of writing you. It's quite a long time I've been recommended to write to you by Mr. Poles. We have corresponded for a while and then I had to leave town. Should it happen that you're married at this time then I wish you luck. No harm of inquiring. In case you're still single and if you care I'd like to meet you some Saturday eve, or Sunday.

Yours sincerely,
Sam Miltz

As it happened, Ida *was* married at the time—to Newman of Newark, a marriage that she claimed she never could account for.

S. N. BEHRMAN, *The Worcester Account: Early Reminiscences*

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Unregistered

He [The. O'Gorman Mahon] used to tell a typically Irish story about two old ladies who lived alone, and who were dreadfully poverty-stricken. One of them had an elderly admirer, and at last, when they did not know where to turn for a few pounds she screwed up her courage and wrote to this faithful swain to beg for some pecuniary assistance. Her letter exhibited such delicacy of feeling and such reluctance to state what she so desperately wanted, that it was almost impossible to unravel the purport of it, till at last she ended up in this wise: "*Could* you, my dear friend, *would* you, I wonder, mind very much—really, I hardly know how to write it! but *could* you let me have five pounds!"

To which request she affixed a postscript that ran as follows: "I felt so dreadfully ashamed and embarrassed at what I had asked in my letter, that I sent the stable-boy galloping after the postman with the mailbag to ask for my letter back; he says he followed him for three miles, but could not overtake him!"

It never occurred to the embarrassed lady that this ingenuous postscript formed part of the actual letter which she stated she had failed to get back!

A. M. W. STIRLING, *Victorian Sidelights*

Air Mail

Here are three ways to get your answer to me:
One, loose your pigeons, for they know my roof.
Tie the message to their legs with a tiny band
And they will bring, but will not understand
The words that one who holds herself aloof
Has written on rice paper with black ink;
That is the quickest way to do it, I think,
Others I know but none as instantly.
Or tie a ribbon to the white swan's neck,
Red for yes or very blue for no,
They pass by here for water. If they go
Three days unribboned I'll know that you walk
In your rose garden waiting for the fall
To tell me by blowing dead leaves over my wall.

MERRILL MOORE, *Answer*

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COOK WANTED

BY VICTOR CANNING

THERE is a small restaurant near the Arc de Triomphe in Paris where the cooking is the best in the world. I'm not giving its name, for the simple reason that good cooking becomes bad cooking when a proprietor tries to fit thirty tables into a room built for twelve.

I walked in one evening and sitting in a corner was Monsieur Anton Brunot, whom I hadn't seen for five years. He was looking more miserable than ever, which, as his habitual expression is that of a man faced with catastrophe, was really quite an achievement.

I sat down by him and asked him how things went.

"Badly, mon ami," he said. "I am contemplating suicide."

The patron came along at that moment and there was a period of gastronomic skirmishing while I ordered.

Anton knew more about food than perhaps any other man in the world, and when I ordered an omelette Baron de Barante, then saddle of lamb and a bottle of Musigny, I looked to him for approval. There was only misery in his eyes and he sighed like a wind tunnel. Then for himself he ordered a bowl of clear soup and some toast.

My surprise showed on my face. It was like hearing a confirmed whisky-drinker ask for malted milk.

"Mon ami, to eat no longer interests me," he explained. This from a man who, I knew, lived only for food, from a man whose father had been one of the world's five best chefs, from a man who could have been more famous than his father if he had wished.

He shook his head sadly. "Soup and toast . . . I live on it these days."

Anton Brunot was a large, plump man with a fluffy tonsure of almost white hair, and a pair of lachrymose eyes that fitted his glum face better than any bloodhound's. He looked about sixty but I knew he was nearer forty.

I said, "You'd better tell me about it."

"Willingly, mon ami. But first, tell me—are you looking for a job?"

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"No, I'm not." I was an assistant chef at the Hôtel Balzac and was very happy there.

"A pity," he said gloomily. And then after a pause made gusty with a long sigh, he went on, "You know my father left me enough money to live on comfortably . . . to eat well. Where food is concerned, mon ami, I do not have to tell you that I am an artist . . . a genius, even."

"Then what's the trouble? Why aren't you eating?"

He told me. The war had wiped out the investments from which he drew his income, but because of his reputation as a gourmet he had become an inspector of restaurants for a famous French guide-book. He had travelled all over France, eating well and free, and deciding what rating restaurants should have in the guide-book.

But then—and I remembered that I had heard some rumour about it—he had slipped. He had begun to take bribes and to tip off proprietors when he was coming so that they could put on a show and get a higher rating. And in the end he was found out and sacked.

"My friend," he said, "after that I spent four awful months. It began to look as though I should have to take a job as a chef. Imagine," he rolled his eyes, "to cook for other people who have no respect for the true artist—*épouvantable*! But, fortunately, an idea came to me in time. I found a way whereby I could eat well again and have enough money for the modest luxuries my nature demands."

For the last three years, he explained, he had been travelling from one European capital to another, living easily. And this was how he did it.

He would pick out some house or flat where a married couple lived. He would find out their names and then he would buy a couple of theatre tickets, always in the stalls, and post them to these people with a note indicating that they were with the compliments of the management, or just anonymously from an old friend.

Now, anyone who gets free theatre tickets may spend a pleasant hour wondering why, or who the anonymous friend is—but, in the end, they will always use the tickets.

"There is no one," said Anton, "with the will to resist something for nothing. On the night, mon ami, I would be waiting across the road and watch the couple go out. Once they were away, I knew I was safe for three hours and in I would go. I was never immoderate, mon ami. Just reasonable. I would take enough money for running expenses and small luxuries and, if there was no cash about, I'd take something that could be

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pawned. I always sent the pawn tickets back because people are sentimental about silver cigarette-boxes and jewellery.

"And sometimes, if the mood was on me, I would go into the kitchen and cook myself a meal. But not often, mon ami, for most kitchens . . . One look and my soul would shrink! Anyway, long before the couple were back from the theatre, I would be away. It was a perfect arrangement. I travelled. I lived. I ate—and I was happy. Until last year in London."

And in London trouble had come to him.

He had been there three months and had worked his trick three times quite smoothly. Then he had picked out a couple who lived in a small mews cottage near Hanover Square. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Archer.

He shook his head dolefully. "She was elegant, mon ami. Chic. Tall, fair-haired, blue eyes like cornflowers, and a laugh that was pure silver. For her husband, he was big, thickset . . . just another man to pass in a crowd."

He had watched them for a week, and then he had bought his tickets and sent them along. And when the night came they went off and he went into their place.

At this point my omelette Baron de Barante came along.

"It's odd you should have ordered that," he said. "You'll see why later. But now I shall be silent while you give your attention to it." He watched me eat and his face was full of desperate envy. When I had finished, he resumed.

He had gone into the place using the key that he'd seen them put under a pot of flowers outside the door. One look at the place told him that Mr. and Mrs. Archer were easy-going, well-disposed creatures who liked comfort and the good things of life. In a desk he found an envelope with fifty pounds in it, a little more than he usually reckoned to pick up. Then, full of well-being, he had gone to have a look at the kitchen.

"Mon ami, it was a good kitchen. One glance told me. Your painter sees a scene and knows it is for him, that he must put it on canvas. For me this kitchen was like that. I knew I had to use it."

He had plenty of time and he had made himself an omelette Baron de Barante, a big beautiful omelette stuffed with mushrooms and shrimps, and he was just on the point of serving it when the kitchen door opened and in walked Mr. and Mrs. Archer.

"My friend, I was devastated with surprise. They weren't due back for two hours. I turned round with the pan, and Mrs. Archer gave me a smile and a polite good-evening. Mr. Archer,

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very bluntly, I thought, asked me to explain myself. Fortunately, Mrs. Archer came to the rescue. She pointed out that if we had the explanations first, then the omelette would be spoilt. A perfect woman . . ."

Mrs. Archer had got out two more plates and the three of them had sat down to it and shared a bottle of Beaujolais.

" Mon ami, what a woman! Like a willow tree. And it was a joy to see her eat—though for my own pleasure the omelette would have been more satisfying shared between two rather than three. Over coffee I gave my explanation. I told them the truth, of course, relying on their good nature. They gave me all their sympathy and I began to think I should be allowed to leave without trouble. But I reckoned without Mr. Archer.

" I handed the money back to him and stood up, saying, ' You are two extremely understanding people. I regret any trouble I have caused you.' But it was not as easy as that."

Mr. Archer had pushed the notes back to him and had said, " Keep them, Brunot, and regard them as an advance on your wages. You're a cook in a million and when a man finds a good cook these days, he hangs on to him. You're staying with us—and if you won't, I'll have to go to the police."

Anton Brunot sighed and looked miserably at the plate of soup before him. It was getting cold, and a thin film of grease had formed on the top. He pushed it away.

" Mon ami, I tried everything. I appealed to her, but she shook her head. I pointed out that I hated to cook regularly, particularly for other people, and that I should not give satisfaction. But she would not believe this, and rightly pointed out that an artist was an artist and could not spoil a dish if he tried. How well she understood . . ."

And there he was, stuck with the job. And it soon became obvious that the more cooking he did the less appetite he had himself for food. He still went on cooking brilliantly, but for himself there was no longer any joy in eating.

His employers were now living in Paris for a while, and he was over with them. He couldn't run away because they would put the police onto him and he could be easily traced. He was miserable and the only hope they had given him of release was that he should find for them a cook as good as himself. If he did that he could go without fear. He'd tried—but so far without success. How could he? He was better than his father, better than any other chef I knew.

" My friend," he finished sadly, " it's either suicide before starvation kills me, or take the risk of the police when I run away. You're sure you don't want a new position? You might just do,

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though you are—if I remember—a little uncertain on some sauces."

"I'm happy where I am," I said. "But tell me—why did they come back so early from the theatre and catch you?"

"Oh, that . . ." he sighed. "Well, I'd sent them the tickets with the compliments of the management. But Mr. Archer didn't have to have tickets to get in. He was the man who had written the play."

★ ★ ★

Sheer Folly

Even nature herself abhors to see a woman shorn or polled; a woman with cut hair is a filthy spectacle, and much like a monster; and all repute it a very great absurdity for a woman to walk abroad with shorn hair; for this is all one as if she should take upon her the form or person of a man, to whom short hair is proper . . . Yet notwithstanding our English gentlewomen are now grown so far past shame, past modesty, grace and nature, as to clip their hair like men with locks and foretops, and to make this whorish cut the very guise and fashion of the times, to the eternal infamy of their sex. .

WILLIAM PRYNNE, *Histriomastix*, 1632

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Enchanting short novel

"LUDMILA"

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

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Gripping sea story –

When it happened Angus MacFarlane knew with instant and frightful clarity what it meant. Their four lives—and his boat—were at stake.

The Poosie Nancy, *the last seiner to pull up her gear, was working to windward of a small island fifty miles out off the Scottish coast, with the rest of the Scarvaig fleet disappearing homewards. She had begun to move off, when Joe—cockney Joe, always in trouble—had slipped overboard, scrabbling at a rope sling and shackle that followed him into the sea. Mungo Starke, newest member of the crew and a strong swimmer, had saved Joe's life.*

Then it happened—that anguished shriek of metal. Something had caught in the screw, jamming the engine shaft. Donald MacPhee, Angus's big, capable nephew, dived down to find the rope shackle wedged hard into the stern tube. Immovable.

The Poosie Nancy *mounted the flank of an oncoming roller, then slid downwards into the trough, and swung round, helpless, out of control—broadside on to the seas. Wireless transmitter out of action: only reception possible. Away to the south, beneath a wicked sky, lay the island, an upsurge of rock. There was one last hope—the sail. But the sail was lying in the store at Scarvaig . . . Angus knew what that meant.*

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Storm

by P. FITZGERALD O'CONNOR

THERE was only the sound of the sea and the newly heard sound of the whine of the wind in the mast.

"How does it happen, Joe, that the sail is in the store?" asked Angus.

"How?" said Joe, prevaricating. And then Joe saw that what really mattered was what he had done to Angus.

"Blimey, I put the bleeder there. *I* did. I bleeding did—Me." Then, "A perishing nail on a fish-box tore it, that's what. It got torn by a bleeding nail down in the hold, and it wanted mending—"

"Yes, Joe," said Angus gently.

"—wanted mending bad; so I took it a-bleeding-shore to mend it, last weekend. And I didn't say nothing, no, I didn't say nothing because I didn't think you should be bothered with something like that, I didn't, not with something so small. But I did mend it. I did, I did, I—"

"Yes, Joe," said Angus sharply.

"—did mend it, I did. But I left it. I bleeding left it ashore. *I* did, *I* did, *I*—"

"Joe!"

"Did! God-strike-me-down if I didn't leave it up on the—" Joe was opening his mouth, working it speechlessly, ambushed inside himself.

Angus raised his right arm slowly.

"—the second perishing—"

Angus moved his right arm quickly

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" —shelf! *Eh?* "

Angus returned the arm to his side and for a moment none of them spoke.

Then Mungo said, " Hold it, here comes another big one." And pulling Joe with them, they moved this time to the far side of the wheelhouse and each grasped the rail.

When it was past and the froth was bubbling out of the scuppers, Donald remarked in a neutral voice, " It's just getting fresh enough."

Joe began stroking the side of his face where the marks of Angus's fingers already showed red. After a moment he removed his hand and stared at the palm in wonder.

And at last Angus spoke again.

" Well, well," he said. He paused. He started turning away. He said, " Well-well, well-well, well-well."

And then with an odd little jerky movement he went straight into the wheelhouse and closing the door against them—or perhaps it was merely against the pressure of wind—he switched on the lights inside which flung him up into startling relief, and while he was at it he switched on the small navigation lights which burnt outside, forlorn and waving, on top of the wheelhouse; then stretching up to the rack in the ceiling, he pulled out a number of charts that he fingered impatiently through, stuffing them back two and three at a time until they were all back there in the rack except for one, which he now spread out on the table, smoothing part of it clear with an outward move of his hands. Then he leaned over to see what it showed.

In point of fact Angus knew very well what it showed.

And standing in there, surrounded by glass, he looked like a sort of marionette to the others, cut off in that sparkling box into which they felt they could not intrude. Or perhaps he looked like the single inhabitant of a floodlit stage who was acting a sort of dumb-show act for their special benefit—one of the serious kind that keeps its audience enthralled and staring because of its simple deliberation and because its performer appears to be quite unaware of their presence. But this box or whatever they felt it to be was the seat of their communal life. And before he had gone very far with his act the marionette inside turned round, and Angus himself opened the door of the wheelhouse.

The familiar Angus once more, he smiled at them all with his gentle familiar smile.

" Now, Joe," he said, " it's a pity right enough that it has happened; but it's easy done to forget a thing like that, so do not be blaming yourself too much. Instead, you can just get putting the drift-anchor out: mind and give it a good long stretch. Donald—" He turned, chewed on his upper lip. " Donald, just you see what can be done with the shaft from the engine-room. And the engine—try and knock her out into neutral—she's stuck in reverse meantime." He began returning to the box, but again came out. He said, " Do what you can, boys. Mungo, just you

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give Donald a hand with the shaft." Yet he hesitated. He flexed one hand across his forehead. "No. Joe, you can help Donald whenever you have the anchor sorted. Mungo-boy, will you come in with me?" Mungo turned slightly.

With his pale pale eyes half closed he stood there and contemplated the cavorting shadowlike mast whose primary function, he knew, was only to act as a lever support for the brailler pole but which, in an emergency like this, could quite well have carried sufficient canvas to keep them away from that island behind and from all the skerries and reefs around it which, on a night like the one that was obviously coming, would lie darkly there in thunderous noise and amidst the tormented spray, waiting.

With all his attention now strained to the seemingly pointless thought, Mungo acknowledged that with only a small stretch of canvas a boat could quite well stay out at sea where although the rollers are huge in front of a gale they are even, and where although the wind can achieve such a force that it's difficult hearing a man who is shouting beside you, you can keep a boat lying hove-to for as long as you like—quite comfortable provided you stay well away from land—not wallowing broadside on like this with the sea crashing over the gunwale and sooner or later a big one coming and turning you upside-down.

No, not helpless like this but facing the weather almost stem-on and not fighting it, not thrusting against it, but giving to the heavier punches, going back with them, and riding the seas by allowing each roller to lift you up on its shoulder, whatever its size, and then to slide away underneath—yes, quite comfortable really, and if you were not so big as to span two wave-tops at once with the small chance then of breaking in half, you could go to your bunk knowing you'd hardly ship any solid water at all, just the blown stuff. But of course, they hadn't got any canvas to do it.

But they had the drift-anchor up in the peak. And using a drift-anchor, he was telling himself, you could ride out a gale almost as well as you could with a small stretch of canvas. Not quite, of course, for although a drift-anchor holds you stem-on and slows up your drift and keeps you more or less comfortable, it doesn't give you the power that a sail gives you to dodge what's lying astern. The movement astern is direct and inexorable. Inexorable.

Big lumps of rain were sweeping across the sea and Mungo was glad to get off the decks and into the wheelhouse. But when he was inside, he couldn't make out why Angus had wanted him there since, after they'd closed the door, Angus said nothing for quite a long time but merely stood there, gazing at part of the chart on which were exposed the details of that isolate island down to the south. If he wanted to see them, Mungo reflected, that was the only way he could do so now, since the island itself had gone into the night.

"Looks a good spot for lobsters. All those skerries and things." Angus weighed up his answer.

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"A very good spot for lobsters," he agreed, soberly and without pretence. "But if any person was putting his creels out there today, he'll never see them again."

He switched off the light.

They could then see forward where Joe, with one of his shoulders tuckered up into his neck to keep out the spray, had the canvas bucketlike drift-anchor over the side while fathoms of rope streamed away from the bows.

The end of the rope was already fastened on to the bitts, they saw, and now as the strain exerted itself the slack rope leapt from the water into the air and quivered like the string of a bow from which an arrow has just been shot. The *Poosie Nancy* jerked, pulled up, and was flung round in a quarter arc of the compass. It came as a surprise to realize that, broached to, she'd been moving at such a speed as to warrant that swift reaction.

Joe attended to the bitts with an extra pat. He bent low and turned. Scuffling along the decks with a series of quick little taps of his feet in front of the wind, he dropped through the engine-room hatch astern. Then Angus observed sadly, "Joe is just very pleased at getting his hands on something to do. I'm thinking he's a wee bittie chuckle-headed just now."

Mungo grinned, nodded. Too late to answer he realized that neither the grin nor the nod could have been seen. But it hadn't mattered.

Presently hammering sounds came up from below and mingled, curiously brittle by contrast, with all the increasing noises outside.

In about ten minutes the day was completely done.

And then it was darkness and strife, and conjecture.

Yet physically at this stage, they weren't badly off. With the boat now stemming the weather, that violent rolling had ceased, and the new movement was not unpleasant. They went up, up, up and she paused and flung and then they came down, down, down and again she paused and flung, and then they went up, up, up . . . Like sliding blindfolded over a switchback in very slow motion, thought Mungo.

Plenty of thumps and screams all round but none of that sickening rush and leaving your tummy suspended aloft to confuse the work of your heart. For these rollers in front of the gale were big and evenly spaced, coming out of the Arctic eighty and perhaps a hundred yards apart, with a great reach-at-the-bottom floundering waste in between.

They were even like that, he reflected, because they hadn't yet met any backlash from land. Not out here.

Presently Angus said, "Donald understands his job."

"Donald? Why, yes. Yes, I'm sure he does."

A minute or two passed. Then, "In any case, there is only room for two round the shaft."

"Yes, of course." Mungo looked at the other searchingly in the dark.

But Angus did not speak again for quite a long time.

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There should have been a moon.

By the calendar and by the state of the tides it was a three-quarter moon, waxing. But they never saw it.

Now and then however a thinned patch, a seemingly worn part in the tearing blanket above, ripped across where the moon should have shown. Their circle of vision was then enlarged, for a few moments. But as yet that enlargement only revealed further viciously glinting wastes.

Most of the time the blanket was down, sheeting across the wheelhouse windows, and soon, as the momentum of the night increased, the boat's timbers started to add to the noise with creaks of complaint and groans of despair.

After an hour or so of trying various other things down in the engine-room, they resorted to using a crowbar. It didn't get them much further than clarifying the position slightly. But up to then they had only tried turning the shaft.

Donald squatted back on his heels, momentarily defeated. His face was now red and was streaked with sweat and smudged with black oil marks. He lifted one hand and drew it across his forehead. And that merely altered the pattern a little.

" Right enough, it must be clinched with the shackle. But the rope itself is holding the blades." He nodded, then nodded again. " There's a tiny bit of give each time but it contracts back as soon as I let go the pressure. I have a feeling that without the rope there as well she would come round easy enough."

Joe said, " God-strike-me-down, how have I done this to Angus? "

" Just you stop asking that question and hand me those spanners." Donald leaned forward. " We'll undo the coupling and see if we can't get driving the bastard out."

" Mind and don't drive it right out," advised Joe in a moment of sanity.

When Angus did speak again he voiced Mungo's earlier thoughts. " I just suppose you are wondering why it is that I've asked you to stay up here? "

Mungo's mind had been loitering over a number of other topics since then. He'd been thinking, for instance, of Angus's house, and of being up there over weekends. Of the unequivocal little parlour dressed in furniture that might only yesterday have come from the window of one of those multiple stores that advertise hire-purchase terms in the *Oban Times*. Of the photograph of Angus's wife and son in its chromium-plated frame. Of Morag MacPhee, Angus's elder sister and Donald's mother, who came in to tidy up and prepare a meal before they returned on Friday nights, who attended to their wants on Saturday mornings and left them to fend for themselves on Sundays.

She'd be up in the kitchen now, he'd thought, getting a good fire on for her baking, expecting them back any time.

He'd been thinking too of how good it had been of Angus to ask

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him up to the house in the first place, instead of leaving him by himself in the foc'sle over weekends, when Donald went off to his parents' croft and Joe to that patient old-age-pensioner widow. He'd remembered how Angus and he sat at nights in that rounded room off the kitchen—reading the papers or doing the pencilled accounts and working out food and fuel requirements, or perhaps just sitting in front of the fire and talking.

His mind had loitered also over the image of Angus, dressed in a tight brown suit with his hair flattened down and even that clump on the crown regimented, ready to go off to kirk, morning and evening, on Sundays.

This then had reminded Mungo of how one night when he himself had brought up the subject—and why had he done it?—Angus had not been hurt and had even agreed with the worn-out assault that " the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath," but, " if you happen to live with folk who sincerely believes it's the other way round—why, it costs very little not to upset them." For some reason then he'd recalled his astonishment on learning from Morag that Angus was fifty-nine years old and not just fifty.

He'd remembered too the deep-cutting stream that came from the moorland behind. How it flattened out over the granite alongside the house before narrowly dropping down past the pub and into the harbour below. And of course, every so often he'd wondered what Angus was thinking of all this time, while they waited to see what Donald could do with the engine.

But as it happened, when Angus made that remark Mungo's mind had returned somewhere near to the subject. In a jam like this, he'd been thinking: it's possible, with some men, to stay in the dark for over an hour and a half without speaking and without feeling you have to speak—but not with many. Now, it didn't enter his head to degrade the question with acted modesty.

" As there's only room for two round the shaft, I suppose it was Joe or me. And I don't suppose you'd have had much fun with Joe up here in his present frame of mind."

Angus switched on the light.

Mungo saw he was smiling.

" And Donald. Well now, Donald is a fine lad and I wouldn't interfere with Donald doing his job. But Donald and I are understanding each other's ideas too good to be comfortable. Together in here we'd have had this boat at the bottom by now." He stroked a mark on the table without seeming to see it. It was a long score, a gash in the woodwork: a slip on somebody's part with a knife. " No, I am just very pleased to have you beside me, Mungo-boy."

The words called for no answer. Their relationship, the fact of their close touch with each other, was suddenly tacit and grasped, although inexplicable. After all this time.

" You're a fine cool man," enlarged Angus. " None of these flights of fancy. Or if you have," he corrected himself with sage reflection, " you don't force them on others." He sighed. " But that's not all the reason for my being pleased at having you here."

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It was the nearness to danger that allowed him to make it explicit like that, thought Mungo with a glow of inward gratification. Yet he also felt shame in the face of that stolid acceptance of life.

Angus flexed one hand across his forehead. "Still some hope," he reverted. "The way I've been thinking, it's no good chasing our feet round the place, no good at all. There's just four chances, and we've plenty of time. All we can do is to take each one in its turn, and hope we are never having to look at the fourth."

And that's what they did.

The first was eliminated really, when the door flung open and Donald came in and pressed the door shut behind him and said, "Aye, aye."

They knew it then. But to remark on the fact immediately would have been slightly indecent.

Donald pulled a strip of engine-room rag from his pocket; it was filthy. "Dirty," he remarked. He wiped his face which, if anything, was filthier than the rag. Then in case they'd mistaken him, "Dirty outside," he added.

Angus nodded. "Dirty," he echoed. He clasped the wheel a little more tightly as if he were steering a course, and the veins stood out on the back of his hands.

Presently Donald returned the rag to his pocket. "Joe has gone to the foc'sle. I believe he is making the supper."

"Ah yes, the supper." Angus nodded again, patiently. "We were seeing him prancing along the decks a wee while ago like the doctor at home coming out of the hotel bar."

There was a pause.

Then Donald said, "Your shaft, Angus." He sniffed. "It's just very firm."

Another, barely perceptible pause, then, "Oh? still very firm, is it? Well, well, if it's firm that's all there is to it, and we're not the first who have had a firm shaft." He leaned forward. "I suppose that wind is still in the same direction exactly."

Mungo also leaned over to see.

"How much change would it need, Angus?"

"At the distance we must be off now? A shift of five or six points in either direction would take us clear of the place, I'd think. Five would probably do it." He rapped the compass. "But six for safety, you understand?"

The other two nodded, quite seriously.

Suddenly a figure loomed up from the struggling world outside, arrived in the arc of the wheelhouse lights with all the appearance of a muted banshee rising out of an Irish bog. It was Joe. He pressed his face against one of the windows. His mouth worked, opening and shutting wordlessly; he gesticulated. Supper was ready.

Angus and Donald had theirs first.

Then Donald returned to the engine-room and Angus relieved Mungo up in the wheelhouse, and Mungo went for his own. After

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he'd finished Mungo stretched himself fore and aft on a locker seat with his feet up against one of the timbers and above the level of his body. The boat's movement was still huge and even, and although things slid about here and there nothing was actively tossed around.

Joe finished the washing-up.

He fastened everything into its place. He swept the crumbs from the table; he passed a damp cloth over the top and polished the dampness away. He flicked at the big clock and barometer up in the peak from where the built-in bunks stretched down either side, curtained off and in pairs one on top of the other, along the swelling flanks of the hull. And all the time, with the sound of the wind down here as a long-drawn-out howl of commiseration, Joe maintained the stream of invective against himself.

Gradually, with his mind returned to what Angus had said in the wheelhouse, Mungo began to find Joe as a background noise rather irritating.

He said, "Joe, I like you and I'm very sorry you have so much on your mind, but I wish you'd vary your way of putting it somehow." And as he said it he found himself filled with wonder at how they were going on having their meals and tidying up and using the side of the boat and things as if they were merely heading for port. Angus was right, of course. It was no good chasing their feet round the place.

"But you don't understand," continued the desperate voice beside him. "None of you—you won't understand. What I mean is that I've done this to Angus. Me. I have."

Joe started to polish a brass handrail. It didn't hinder him. ". . . Never out of a bleeding mess, me. Now I've gone and put Angus into a proper mess—Angus who always gets me out of the messes I put myself into. But there isn't no one to take poor old Angus out of this mess I've bleeding well made for him."

"Quite right, Joe."

"It comes from not being brought up proper, see?"

"All right, Joe; all right. I'll go on deck."

"That's why I'm always making a mess of something."

Mungo swung his legs to the floor.

". . . I never had the same chances as everyone else, see?"

Mungo reached up the hatchway.

". . . I never had no father to show me what to do as a kid, nor no mother come to that. Not like other people, I didn't."

In the act of pulling himself on deck, Mungo abruptly stopped. He narrowed his eyes. He came down again.

"Joe," he said; "you've got something there."

"I suppose I must be a bastard," pursued the unhappy Joe . . . But Mungo had gone.

They were now coming further apart.

Having tested the drift-anchor rope for wear, Mungo lay down in the bows and peered over the gunwale. Momentarily the black-

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ness above had relented, and out of the grey clearance in front, under a dustcloud of silvery sweeping spray, the oncoming crests could be seen advancing from quite a long distance off.

The crests themselves were feathered by the wind, he saw, but the rollers beneath were indifferent to the wind. Their power now surpassed the power of the wind: there was no scurried impatience, no rustle and bustle; instead there was solid weight. Long and certain and almost leisurely, looming far up above the mast-head level whenever the boat was down in a trough, they approached one after the other, mighty, intent; and each one behaved just as its forerunner had done.

Confronted with something there on its face, it would draw up for an instant as though mildly astonished at finding an object which neither stood firmly against it nor yet went completely with it. It would swirl, as if frowning; a little subsidiary wavelet of three or four feet would form on top of the crest and, vexed as it were, would break on the stem to peek up at Mungo's face and lash him before dropping back.

But by then the main roller itself would have seemingly given a shrug of disdain at being delayed by such an irresolute foe and, thrusting them skyward out of the way, would have gone on its passage, raking along the bilges with a sibilant hiss of disgust.

And in the course of each one of those, thought Mungo, we'll have been dragged several yards further down to the south.

He rose, half crouched, and braced himself—bodily against the night, mentally against his inner enthralment—and bent like that, he scuffled along the decks in front of it all with a series of quick little taps such as Joe had taken.

It seemed quite cosy inside the wheelhouse, and quiet by contrast.

"How's it go, Angus?"

Angus stroked his cheeks. "The man on the wireless has just been telling me that a Mister Aneurin Bevan has been talking to someone or other. About his ideas, I believe the man said."

"Oh yes?"

"He was also telling me that the Arsenal football eleven has been beating some other kind of football eleven."

Mungo grinned. "A lot of people will be interested in that," he agreed. "Stirring events." He shook the wet off his face and took out a handkerchief.

The other looked slightly lost for a moment but, absorbed just then in drying his neck, Mungo did not notice this.

"Mind you"—Angus had raised his eyebrows—"I'm not past filling in a coupon myself. With a pin, you understand." The eyebrows came down. "It must be a great affair altogether, this football industry, although I have never seen how they work it myself."

Again Mungo grinned. And still without understanding of what had occurred to Angus alone up here in the wheelhouse, he persisted, "But how does it go? Your second chance, I mean."

And Angus drew in his breath.

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Presently, " The man on the wireless began what he had to say by telling me that we're having a northerly gale in these parts and that it's to come severe." He stared at the compass.

" Is it still that way? "

" Still coming straight as a stag running after a hind from the north."

A heavy metallic clonk of spanners being used below struck on Mungo's hearing with a hollow, forlorn sort of ring. Puzzled, he held the handkerchief against his neck and glanced up. But Angus's face was averted.

As if addressing someone outside, Angus said slowly, " I am afraid it would take a shift of a good many more than six points to swing the boat clear at the distance we must be coming in now, and I do not believe it will shift even one point for us." He turned back in. And then Mungo was horrified at the grey expression that showed under the mask of flippancy. Yet as if he were unaware of the other's presence, Angus continued, " So now we must look at our third hope. It—it's not much of a hope at that, mind. Hope for ourselves, perhaps, but—but not for the boat." And the word " boat " came out as if it were spelt *poat*.

The sounds from below broke off.

It wasn't quiet then because none of the rushing noises outside had ceased. But it seemed so suddenly, terribly silent that Mungo began urgently searching around for something to do or to say.

His eyes fell on the gash in the table woodwork. It was that slip on somebody's part with a knife, and although it had been there ever since Mungo had been on the boat he had never taken it in before. But he now became deeply aware of it. The disfigurement was imbued with an irresistible and eerie significance. It burnt on his attention. And he stood there waiting, knowing now how clumsy he'd been, but unable now to move or to speak.

Then Angus lifted a hand, a gnarled hand, and with his eyes focusing closely on the mark, he stroked it gently as if he thought that by doing so he could make it better, but when his hand came away the mark was still there as a hurt to his boat and both of them stared in a dazed sort of way until finally Angus's eyes started to lose their focus when, with a strange little thrusting movement, he lowered his hand once more, putting the whole palm down on the mark in an effort to keep the hurt of it hidden this time.

But the awful thing was that his hand then started to tremble and although he tried to control it by clenching it into a fist it wouldn't stop trembling in front of them both so that, defeated at last, he had to remove it and leave the mark more exposed than ever before. He closed his eyes. And then he looked suddenly very old.

Appalled at being a witness, Mungo averted his gaze.

It had been such a small relapse—so momentary—and yet so dreadful to see.

They used Joe's mattress first.

They thoroughly soaked it in oil, gave it an overcoat of petrol,

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lowered it over the stern on the end of a line, and then threw a lighted petrol flare at it and let the line go.

A snarling, spitting wildcat of fiery enragement, it made a tremendous blaze and, unrestricted by the drift-anchor, was away out astern of them—or ahead of them if you look at it that way—in no time at all, having all the appearance of being drawn along by the flames themselves which, for an instant, would leap up and around in a sort of rearguard pounce of the hunted animal and then again would stretch out flat across the waters, racing on into the night. Nor wind nor rain nor sea could dampen its ardour while it had life.

In the wheelhouse, Angus returned to the chart. His eyes were attentive once more. "It would have done no good at all to have started that sooner," he remarked. "We would just have been lighting an empty world."

They watched it heading due south, rising up to the heights before momentarily disappearing over the further slopes and all the time glaring up at the low-packed heavens.

It died, abruptly. Like a wild creature shot. And then they put Donald's mattress over the side.

Watching this with vicarious pride, Donald said, "They should be seeing that right enough." He coughed, for his words had come out in the bellow to which the demands of working outside had accustomed him. He lowered his voice experimentally, to a whisper as it turned out, "Even in this weather."

No one answered.

A figure lurched past one of the windows. Angus regarded its progress sadly.

"Joe is not at all keen to come into this wheelhouse."

Mungo smiled and Donald nodded. Then his mind not stretching to fine emotion, Donald said, "Will they manage to send out a boat, do you suppose? Or is it a breeches-buoy they have?" A speculative look came over his face. "I was never using a breeches-buoy myself."

There was a pause. Mungo saw in his mind's eye the *Poosie Nancy* deserted while, in his mind's ear, rang an echo: "Hope for ourselves perhaps, but—"

Then Angus said coolly, "There is fifteen folks live on that island and every man jack has his house on the far side of the hills." And at that, Donald's expression became grim.

Mungo narrowed his eyes. He smiled straight into Angus's face with a cajoling, droll regard.

Donald started shifting his feet.

"Is that the way of it? Well, if it is, we're—" He blinked, catching the smile of complicity Mungo had forced on Angus. He twisted a curl of his short fair hair, glancing from one to the other. Then in a light-hearted voice, "Ah well, there might be a couple out shifting a cow on the hills to see us." And in case Mungo was unfamiliar with the phrase, "A courting couple, you know."

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Angus shrugged an ironic shoulder. "It must be a job finding a warm dry spot to sit down, right enough. I don't understand how the couples will manage on nights like this in the cities, where they have no cows to shift."

And they left it at that.

But no answering flare came from the unseen island.

When Angus's mattress had followed Mungo's, Donald returned to the engine-room wordlessly and without even waiting to see the blaze. He had the gears of the engine stripped in order to get more leverage onto the shaft, and he worked on now in spite of the fact that he'd already bent the shaft in his efforts. In spite of the fact that he knew with part of his mind that even if the miracle did happen, even if the screw did come unexpectedly clear, it was doubtful whether he'd get all those heavy parts reassembled in time. For he knew they were drawing near to an end.

They all knew it.

Neither wind nor tide had taken them off the line to that oblivious island. The changed action of the sea told them. This had revealed itself subtly at first but now the effect was blatant. Every few minutes that immensely even movement of the boat suffered a rude interruption. It was as if an enormous hand came blackly out of the strife astern and flicked her.

"We'll be on the edge of the jangle," Angus remarked to Mungo. His voice was laconic. "Tide's coming up to the full flood."

It was for that he'd been watching the chart, for Angus knew all about the tides on the northern side of this island. He knew that they were confused here by a number of influences—that because of the changing depths and the various skerries at certain distances out from the shore, they were forced here to run in a series of contrary races to the rest of the sea. And Angus knew that where mighty volumes of water join issue on a night like this, you get chaos.

Not an even sea like outside, not a sea that a boat can tackle stem-on, but a riotous incomprehensible turmoil that boats do well to avoid where, harassed by the waters behind, yet foiled by the water in front, and torn by the wind above, those opposing races rush at each other in torment to fling themselves far in the air and burst in great explosions, so that a boat in the middle has it coming from every direction.

Roughly, from the changed movement, Angus could tell how much longer they'd got. He was fatalistic about the jangle: nothing they tried could make any odds. Yet he knew that his boat, built like a solid tub, had a fair chance where others would certainly turn. Through, on the far side of the jangle, they would meet the backlash coming away from the island. And then they would look at their last hope.

No one knew better than Angus how slender a hope it was that a fisherman's anchor would hold on a night like this. But beyond that hope was acceptance of final defeat on the pounded rock.

It was perhaps an irrelevant thought that prompted Angus a

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moment later to say softly, " I am very sorry you are not a praying man, Mungo-boy."

Mungo was watching the glare of Angus's mattress. He made no answer.

Solid and unshakable in his own convictions, Angus was distressed more than ever that at this eleventh hour even, Mungo would not allow himself to accept the same comfort.

" Why do you close yourself up like that? " he demanded, cutting through niceties. And when still there was no reply, " I believe you must once have been a very religious person. I'm thinking that only a man who knew all about his religion could act all that firm against it." Yet Mungo remained silent . . .

At that moment the flares from Angus's mattress went out.

And simultaneously that hand, capricious, moved up from the stern and started throwing them round with seemingly earnest intent. Things that had been fastened about the boat strained to get loose and here and there did get loose.

A sudden clamour from the engine-room, followed by Donald's voice raised through the floorboards uttering wrathful oaths in Gaelic, suggested that two or three hundred spanners had leapt from the flanks of the hull. From the hold came slithering sliding thuds, but just as Mungo began moving out to attend to these, they ceased.

" Joe," said Angus, nodding.

Mungo jammed himself back in the corner. Angus hung on to the wheel and braced himself with his legs widespread. Presently Joe's figure appeared in the arc of the lights once more.

Angus breathed heavily as if he wished he could give Joe a scolding.

They watched the figure come grappling along the rearing decks from the mast to the winch where it hung for a moment under a cloud of spray before it pursued an undignified course on all fours to the engine-room hatch. Huge masses of water that spouted in lumps all round and above their own level burst, white like fireworks in the dark, and now and then—catching the boat off balance —came pounding onto the decks.

Quite suddenly Mungo said, " Do you like what your Lord is doing to you now? "

And Angus was horrified.

Not at the words—Angus was no bigot—but at the fact of Mungo saying something so far beneath his own level. Angus knew the remark to be childish and wickedly prompted on the spur of the moment; he knew that there must be a simple answer. He was sad that he was uneducated and didn't know that answer.

He said simply, " Man, if the Lord fetched us out of every piece of trouble we put ourselves into, why then there would be no purpose at all in our living on earth."

Because he was gazing into a window across which the top of a broken sea had been flung, Angus did not see Mungo's expression. But he heard a slight sound behind and not knowing how he had

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touched him, Angus was glad he had done so somehow; and taking the shock of a blow which, to all intents, had momentarily turned one wall of the wheelhouse into the floor, he thought: I do not believe the boy is so firm after all.

But Angus had not the means to express what went with this thought. And Mungo, ashamed of his one remark and knowing himself to be somehow reduced yet concealing this in the thought that he had no wish to hurt Angus further, said nothing. So they maintained a sort of regretful silence while their bodies flexed and reflexed, flexed and reflexed.

Suddenly the door was flung open in front of Joe and the night screamed round inside.

Angus clutched at his chart. Joe hurtled in and slammed the door shut behind him, then backed into the corner opposite Mungo.

Angus rearranged his chart. He said, "Aye, aye."

Joe muttered something, glared at the floor.

Mungo looked at him narrowly. Yet for a while none of them spoke.

Then Joe burst out, "Well, why don't you tell me it's all my fault?"

A pause.

"Take it easy, Joe."

Joe rounded on Mungo. "Keep your bloody hands off me, will you?"

Angus looked up and for a moment his face was hopeless.

Joe said, "The shackle, the sail. Why don't you tell me it's all my fault?" He stared at Angus's back with angry despair.

Angus gazed at the table. Another string of oaths came up from below. Then Angus said, "Yes, Joe; very well. It is your fault that we have no sail."

And Joe made a funny whimpering noise.

"But, Joe, no one is blaming you—except, perhaps, yourself." Angus raised his eyebrows. "It is just one of those things."

And then in a scarcely audible voice, Joe said, "Ah-h-h."

The chaos outside became less chaotic; the belligerence went from Joe's frame. He started to speak once more but Angus cut in. Angus said, "We'll be coming out of the jangle; it is time we got ourselves sorted. Fetch Donald up and put on your life-jackets."

Angus was leaning over the table and the other three were clustered around him.

They all looked rather bulky and uncomfortable with their oil-skins pulled on over their life-jackets. But beneath these they were each of them stripped to the essential jersey, trousers, and gym shoes, ready to discard the oilskin at a moment's notice. And each had a short rope sling round his waist.

Angus was speaking.

"It's a shelving bottom, you see. It goes up fast from sixty fathoms to where the reefs start. It's gravel." He stabbed the

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cipher as if this were a reprehensible business on the part of the chart. "There is no hope at all of the anchor keeping a hold in gravel, not with this blow. But there are patches of rock there as well." He touched the chart with a slightly forgiving forefinger. "If we are just very fortunate dragging the anchor below us a fluke will catch under one of the rocks." He paused, smiled. "And if that happens, some of us might be able to get to our bunks." He stopped smiling. "You will give it every bit of the thirty fathoms of chain that we have, Donald. And—" At that moment they were all abruptly precipitated into one corner of the wheelhouse—"And shackle the heavy rope onto the end."

When they had struggled free of each other, Donald echoed stoutly, "And shackle the heavy rope onto the end, Angus."

Angus nodded.

"In the eventuality of the anchor not getting sight of one of these needles in the haystack—" he drew in a breath—"in that eventuality we will keep both the drift-anchor and the bottom-anchor out to the last. Mungo-boy, I think you had better attend to those ropes. You are quick on your feet. You will have to move fast afterwards, and with great care. Just like a cat."

Mungo nodded.

Angus continued to gaze at Mungo.

"There will be a lot more noises outside than there is even now, and since you will not be able to hear anything I may be trying to say, you will have to decide for all of us which is the best moment to cast off the ropes. It is difficult." He sighed.

"We do not want to be stuck halfway up on a reef, like a tethered goat hanging over the cliffs, by the anchor. When it is certain that we are going onto a rock or a reef or whatever it is, you will wait for a big sea to get hold of the boat and then you will let her go up. That is the ideal." He paused. "But do not wait for too long. We want the sea to fling her as far up as it will do, you understand?"

Mungo nodded again. Not to be out of it, Joe nodded as well.

Angus frowned.

"The drift-anchor," he said. "Let me see, let me think." He shrugged his shoulders. "You may find there is some circumstance when you have to let the drift-anchor go before the end."

Mungo said, "Yes, Angus."

"Then—" Angus hesitated. He turned from them all and dropped his eyes to the table. "Then we will have to go. The boat will be smashed. You will be crunched if you stay. I, we—" He flexed one hand across his forehead. "You know you will be hurled up whatever kind of thing we end on; there is no good in me pretending you won't. If you are still—that is, if you are not hurt too bad, remember: the sea has a terrible drag-back off a reef."

He waved one hand impatiently. "I hardly need to tell you this, but you must use all your youth and your strength before the sea starts to go back. Do not give up at that moment. You must not let the sea drag you back because it will break you up before it lifts and hurls you in for the second time."

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He breathed heavily. "The tide will be just about full flood. If it is any fortune that we get, remember—the tide will be going away very soon; and these northerly gales, of course, they drop off just as fast as they come fierce. If, should you manage to get onto any kind of thing above water, you will be able to wait until daylight. Aye, aye, until daylight." He paused once more. Then he said, "If we are not so fortunate, we will have to remain on board. There is a lot of half-submerged reefs out at sea on the north side here. If—"

He stopped.

But as Mungo realized with pity, looking now at the side of Angus's face, there was nothing Angus could say to exhort them on that line. It was pointless his speaking of what they should try if the boat struck on a half-submerged reef out at sea tonight.

Angus looked suddenly very old again. Without turning his head to any one of them in particular, he said, "I pray the Lord to look after you all."

He closed his eyes.

For the fourth time the *Poosie Nancy* jerked, pulled up.

In their various parts about the boat each one of them held his breath: Angus in the act of leaving the wheelhouse, Donald and Joe already crouched in the bows, Mungo down in the foc'sle.

Mungo had one hand inside his bunk while he steadied himself with the other, and his body swayed in unison with the wild plunges of the boat like that of a man riding an unbroken horse. But before he was forced to release his breath, it was over. As on the three occasions before, a grating vibration went through the whole hull: whatever the anchor had touched on the bed of the sea had been insufficient to hold her.

And now, letting his breath come out in a whistling sigh, Mungo continued to search the back of his bunk for a package he'd kept concealed between two of the timbers.

He drew something out.

He pushed up his lower lip in a brief smile to himself. Almost his entire earnings over the last few months were in that package—a hundred and twenty pounds in five- and ten-pound notes—and whether it made any odds or not, he'd nearly left it behind. As he tied it onto his belt under the length of rope, a small saying of Angus's passed through his mind: "When you have a little, keep a little, and then when you have nothing you'll have something." Well, he was being logical enough anyway.

He gave a sober stare round the foc'sle.

Joe had done his stuff: it all looked as smart as Mungo had ever seen it. The brasswork shone, the dark woodwork glowed; the big clock and barometer glinted up in the peak; the mirror he'd shaved in almost every morning over the last eight months reflected the polished stove and part of the table. Mungo was very glad that Angus wouldn't be down to review it.

He switched off the lights; yet he hesitated in the dark. He

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switched the lights on again: they worked perfectly. He fondled the knob of the switch between his forefinger and thumb. And then, for the last time, he switched off the foc'sle lights. The boat took a violent lurch at this moment and the floor pivoted upwards and, clutching the hatchway, Mungo pulled with his arms.

He emerged with his head at deck level into a world of confusion, of thunder and strife that was instantly bewildering. For overhead, the blanket had thinned out during his absence so that now the diffused light of the moon shone eerily through it as if to allow some unseen audience to gloat on this, the finale. And even as Mungo bent to accept the weight of a mass of descending water, he saw a long black shadow which stood there apparently firm: the island.

The sea thrust at the water and the air tore at the currents and the sea piled up in the air in towering columns that hung, poised and black, for a moment before they went white at the top and then went white further down and then fell apart and disintegrated all round, whereupon the air, in circuitous fury, snatched at this broken-up water and flung it in every direction while the hulk of a boat in the middle lumpily leapt and descended from one to the other. And at this stage it was discord: it was a force-ten gale meeting its own backlash off the lee shore of a Hebridean island.

But ahead was the ultimate struggle.

Ahead was the wicked, the jagged, the whitely tormented fringe where the air and the water united to fling themselves at the land.

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There in the night these gale-forced rollers out of the Arctic finally pounded on rock. And out of that scene of tumult came the reverberation of thunder. Deep, deep, it sounded right through the screech of the air like the boom of some monstrous bass drum rolling the bellybeat out to a fiendish wailing of giant violins.

Yet the wheelhouse lights blazed on.

Bewilderment over, Mungo came out and crawled forward where, huddled under the gunwale, the other three were now stripped in readiness for the end.

Mungo lifted the skirt of his oilskin and bent with the night. As the material tore up over his body he gave it a final flick then watched it hurtle, a headless and footless phantom with outstretched arms, over the wheelhouse roof. And while he knelt there someone was clasping him round the shoulders.

It was Angus. With his free hand Angus was pointing.

Mungo must get to the bitts, to the ropes.

Mungo nodded and Angus tightened his grip and for a moment they stayed together like that on their knees, their backs to the night, before, reluctantly turning, Angus relaxed his grasp and signed at the others to follow him down to amidships.

Mungo crawled up as the others crawled down. He gave them a round salute with one hand as they passed, and Donald signed back but Joe gave no recognition at all. Joe was bellowing, " Some bloody caper this, some bloody caper this," over and over again in angry despair. But no one could hear.

Mungo reached the bows.

He felt the ropes. They lay off the stem at an angle like the opened blades of a pair of gargantuan scissors, the one to the drift-anchor streaming and quivering out on the surface, the other one presently ineffectual and dragging down in the deep. Both ropes, he found, were strong and unfrayed but something about them worried him. Something. Yes—the one to the bottom-anchor—it was fastened on top of the one to the drift. If he wanted to cast off the drift-anchor first . . .?

He must get them switched. He must fetch Donald up.

He turned.

But he never had time even to signal. For at that moment the *Poosie Nancy* was rising high and whole to a crest and there, in the waste of the previous sea, the long black snout of a reef was baring itself straight in their track and viciously glinting.

The crest rolled on and the *Poosie Nancy* plunged over its back and into the following trough, and Mungo crouched low in futile defence. Three, four hundred yards from land—if she broke up out here there could be no survival.

There was a burst of phosphorescence ahead and the sea exploded.

Yet the backwash had already begun as she touched. The stern had already swung out when from somewhere beneath her amidships there came a surprisingly gentle bump.

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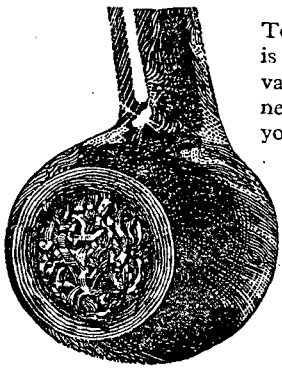

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She canted slightly then rocked then inclined fore and aft and then came a jolt and a sideways slip—and this was the stern falling over the edge and into the deeper water he'd seen to one side—and then, poised like that amidst ongoing violence echoing back from the darkly seen island ahead, she hung.

And she didn't slip off as he'd hoped she would do when the sea dragged away but continued to hang there and now, unsupported, the stern began dropping lower and lower and lower into the deepening hole while, perched in the bows, Mungo went higher and higher and higher until he was forced to clamber right onto the stem itself where he clung incredulously enthroned over the length of the boat and the other three men who, down there, had clamped themselves round the drums of the winch and like that were waiting. And now the stern was at rest on a shelf and the sea was all gone away from the boat and Mungo was able to view what was coming.

He saw; and he moved swiftly.

He leaned downwards and grasped the ropes; he thrust outwards and dropped his body.

With a violent jerk and an upwards twist, he jammed his body between the ropes and the deck and over and round the bitts and then clenched like that he too waited while, black-bulking and white-crested, the next one rolled out of the driven spume, scooped up the floundering waste before it, reared far above them and there, in a curl of hugely suspended perfection, checked, then flung out its long white fingers and then, with the slow slam of insensate certainty, came down.

From stem to stern the boat was enveloped.

And now was relief. Now understanding was gone, gone in a white-spangled roar of oblivion, and only the bodily instinct, thoughtless and past apprehension, shuddered receptively groping under that hand of essential violence, for life. Yet pinioned between the tight-wrenched ropes and the deck Mungo Starke knew a moment almost of perfect unconsciousness before he again realized himself. Then thunder and strife resounded in his ears and all around him was tumult and phosphorescent expended endeavour.

The sea had let go the stem.

Yet below him two-thirds of the boat was submerged, and down there—green-streaked black and instantly weird, incredibly there under water—the wheelhouse lights burnt on, swinging round now and now bursting white as the stern bolted clear and the stem dipped under and the *Poosie Nancy*, shaking herself like a great dog and revealing the preposterous fact of three men still being there on her back, came level.

Then that highrisen sea rolled on: that upthrusting hand slid out from beneath.

And the *Poosie Nancy* came down.

She landed, hard; she bounced, bodily. She lifted and dropped

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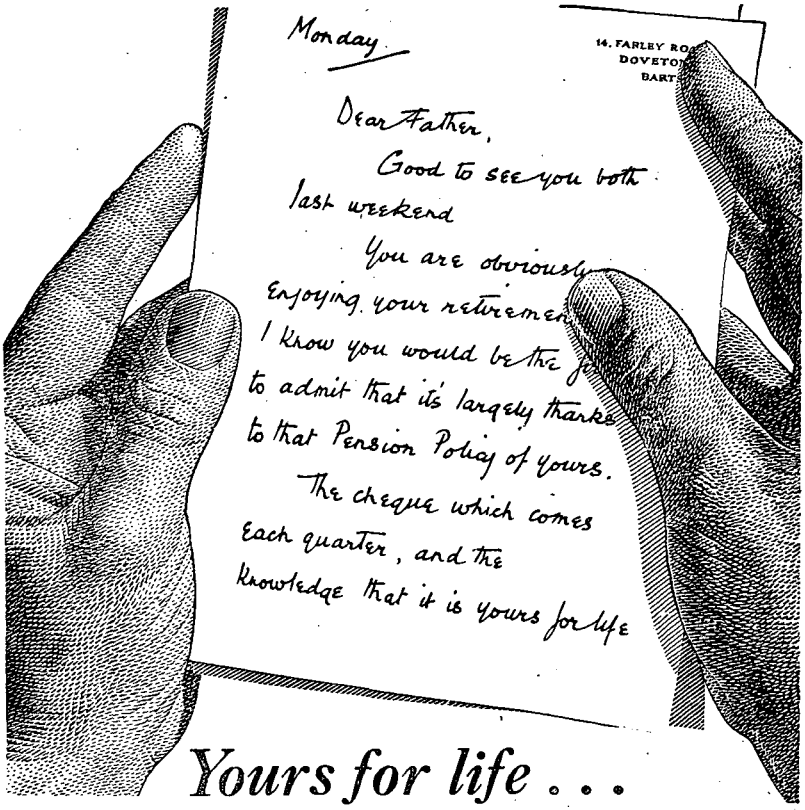

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—once, twice, three times—with dreadful breaking-up, splintering thuds; and delayed on the length of the reef by the drag of one rope, she rocked—forty, fifty, sixty degrees—this way then that until with the next approach she was lifted to go careering off, broaching to, before once again she lurched, halted by the same rope, the drift-anchor rope that he couldn't cast off without also discarding the other. And out now from under the ropes, he gripped the gunwale.

She was coming down.

Now she was down, right down in a valley between two crests—and there had been no thud. Now she was up to one crest—and the reef was behind them.

She was past the reef!

The low-leading rope went taut as he clung there and, eerily quivering, narrowed the angle between itself and the other. The *Poosie Nancy* jerked and, stemming the night, swung true. And the night screamed past and she didn't go with it.

She was held! The last, the improbable chance, had come off: the bottom-anchor was under the reef. And there—there it would be immovable.

Mungo turned, exultant, for Angus. He saw Donald crawling towards him and waved, extravagantly.

But Donald was signing back, wildly, urgently.

What was that—the ropes? Cast off? Was the man mad? Mungo crouched low. And there, like the touch of doom, he too felt it.

Water was rushing in down below.

"She's holed!" screamed Donald. "Cast off, man! cast off! *Let her go in!*"

Mungo returned to the bitts.

He fumbled because he was powerfully sobbing.

Because he was sobbing his mouth was slack, and it flattened out into the semblance of an animal snarl while his eyelids flipped upwards leaving him blinded with spray. By feel he cast off the top rope, the rope that was strong enough down to the chain to have held them all night, and released from that anchor the *Poosie Nancy* momentarily lost her head before she took up the slack on the drift.

He cast off the drift-anchor rope, the rope whose drag had delayed them fatally there on the reef. And entirely freed now, the *Poosie Nancy* went in.

She went in fast and she went in broadside on.

And broadside on to her doom, she struck.

The first one put her right over, one gunwale up, one gunwale down, while suspended from the winch and the mast that were now horizontal the four of them hung down the decks that were now like a wall, and over their shoulders they saw how it pounded away from the tongue of this reef that apparently stretched underwater for quite a long distance before it came up awash—shelving

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and chaotic on one side while dropping down sheer on the other where the sea cut cleanly along it, until it emerged in a humpy-backed blackness that speared the white-leaping fringe of the island —and stunned by the prospect, none did as Angus had said and committed himself. Not even Angus.

The second one burst on the gunwale before it tore through them, and still they contrived to hang on.

The third one did it.

Rising well clear of the gunwale and authorized this time by many more tons it peeled them away and delivered them, four gesticulating bundles, to the lee-side sea which—delayed by the presence of the boat, confused by the cascading breaker, concertina-ed by the backlashes sweeping round either end—was on that moment contrary.

It sucked them straight down and then spewed them up; it beat them back and forth and all the time twirled them round. Its forward momentum renewed it puffed itself up then, taking them with it, went clambering, breaking, crest upon crest in hasty pursuit of the rest of that sea that was surging diagonally over the reef in its path. And so for a while it was high-risen water on water and gasping, tumbling, footless incomprehension.

Then came a blow from beneath.

Then another, solid and tearing and upside-down. Another, another.

And these blows were deadly.

Perhaps the life-jackets took up the worst. For when the forward momentum relented those bundles were all still alive and together, strung in a line. And in each, one instinct immediately ordered: "Hold! Hold something, hold *anything*!"

Three pairs of hands clawed water and the water was withdrawing.

Fourth and last in the line, Donald MacPhee swirled up against a protuberance. He flung out his arms. He hugged solid rock.

Ahead of him Mungo stood up, chest deep, and floundered. Recovering, he rose once more and then was struck down. Two hands scrabbled over his face, clutched at his jersey. The jersey stretched as he got a foothold, then ripped; the owner of the hands slewed sideways, disappeared seaward. Himself following, Mungo flayed water, touched an object and gripped it; and this was an ankle of Donald's. With his free hand Mungo reached out as another body came backwards and grasped an arm. The arm belonged to Angus.

Now landstruck rollers recoiling surged slantwise across the reef, folding over each other joined in the broad-running backwash that swelled up unrelentingly strengthy, streaming their bodies out on the surface. But by now Angus had both arms round Mungo's thighs and Mungo had both hands on Donald's ankles and Donald had hold of the rock in an embrace which, had it been used on his sensible girl-friend in Scarvaig, would have emptied her lungs. And none let go.

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Then the tension relaxed and their bodies were lowered.

Slowly then they sank onto jagged contortions of rock that were limpet-studded and clustered with mussels and through which ran spume-covered rivulets hustling away to little black pools that were snapping with foam and soon almost stagnant; and the three of them lay there in utter exhaustion, face down.

Off to one side was the edge that fell away sheer, and out beyond this was a limitless slough of deep water. And on that suspended instant, it seemed the three men could leave their bodies to lie there for ever.

It seemed that the night as well was exhausted. For even the screech of the air had fallen away to a low moaning whine while the deep, deep boom of the drumbeats, rolling out up and down the coastline, came to their ears as it were from a distant hall. But then, suddenly, it was cold.

Donald kicked out.

Mungo flinched and released him.

Then Mungo sat up and swung round but Angus didn't get up or even release Mungo although he shifted a little as Mungo struggled. So Mungo moved harshly to get himself clear and perhaps he hurt Angus but now he was up and, forcibly lifting the older man onto his feet, he steadied him there before thrusting him forward at Donald who straight away put both his capable arms around Angus and set off dragging him stumbling towards the humpy black ridge that shaped up clear some twenty yards distant over the hardgoing reef which was dark underfoot and uneven with many crevasses and flaws to impede them, and meanwhile Mungo started to follow but slowly as if now he had nothing to do and were mildly stupefied by the hiatus. Yet he was thinking. "The foc'sle . . ." he was thinking, " by now the blankets will all have been tumbled out of those darkly glowing, curtained-off bunks, and the ashes out of the stove. But the big brass clock—it would still be ticking up in the peak."

Perhaps twelve seconds had passed from the moment when Angus had bumped him, and now a dull screech of renewed violence was coming up from behind. It hit him with feline ferocity after he'd taken two steps and he stopped.

He braced himself and turned round.

The *Poosie Nancy* was still there, still out there on the tip but this time risen. And there in the wheelhouse a light still crazily burnt like a glowing heart in her hulk revealing the lee-side waste where, for an instant before it was sucked underneath her, a small black object was plainly displayed as a human head. Then the sea brought her down.

There came dully a crash of splintering woodwork. The light was extinguished; the curving swell of her flank caved in, the sea disintegrated. And then, broken in two, the *Poosie Nancy* fell apart.

Mungo put both hands to his face.

It was over.

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Now he should go, he knew it. Already that sea had puffed itself up; he should go now, *quickly*. He couldn't beat it but he should try. Try to get back to the ridge.

But for what?

Half the reef was engulfed when he splashed to the side that was sheer and stepped off. Shocked by the re-immersion into involuntary action he struck off slantwise and seaward, leaving the turmoil behind him, and into the slough where, sustained by the life-jacket half on his back, he lay expectantly waiting.

Yet for a moment it was almost peaceful. For a moment the movement up was so huge, so certain, so gradual out here, that it didn't seem to be motion at all. Then low-driven spume slashed at his face and now, now, he thought, the matter was finally out of his hands.

But the crest raced on and it left him bobbing and gasping and sliding downwards, enormously downwards into the trough with the wavelets chopping against him in clouds of silvery sweeping spray; and righting himself he saw with a dull little spasm of anger that out in this waste there was nothing definite, nothing decisive: nothing was final. Turning, he saw the two halves of the boat. Silhouetted against the close-packed greyness they loomed up angled and black and imbued with sudden remembrance: Joe.

Joe was somewhere amongst all that. Yes. And they'd all got these life-jackets on, so Joe might still be alive. Out there.

He turned on his face and kicked himself level.

And up on the ridge, shielding his eyes from the oncoming spume, Angus MacFarlane rocked on his knees.

"You clown, you clown, you great big clown," he was whispering blindly into himself. "Whatever do you imagine you're doing, you great big clown? You clown, you—"

Just then the sea began to retreat and the air began to thin out and fleetingly Angus glimpsed that figure again, now beating a purposeful passage towards the broad-running backwash. He glimpsed it once more on the edge of the reef. It swirled, bobbed up and down, came into view far out, then vanished into the greyness.

Angus MacFarlane breathed heavily, clutching his nephew. He'd been wrong. Seen like that in its entirety, the whole bewildering nightmarish act was revealed as deliberate, as a planned piece of timing whose execution, he saw, had been perfect but whose pitiful end, he felt, was certain. With pain at his heart Angus MacFarlane let go of Donald MacPhee and waited.

Presently, like a low-lying cloud over the night, the first wave came up towards them, empty, and after a while it withdrew.

The second one brought up a few odd pieces of wreckage and it left some behind.

The third one brought up a great deal of wreckage and something far out that it took back with it.

When the fourth one flung two close-lashed bodies alongside

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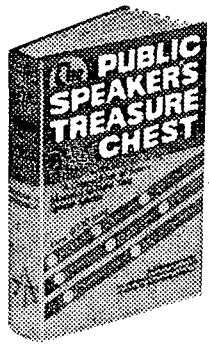

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the ridge, Donald sprang forward into the surf and Angus came lumpily after . . .

They laid them out on the ridge.

Angus's knowledge of medical matters was simple, but the question demanded no more than a simple answer. He bent to one bared chest and listened and a few moments later he bent to the other. He fastened up Mungo's clothing and knelt down again beside Joe. Presently he raised his head and shouted something at Donald. Donald could not make out what Angus had shouted so Angus grasped him with violence and signed, pointing inshore. Donald nodded.

The tide was then at full flood and the gale by now at its height and all that had happened had happened.

The wind, thought Mungo, must have taken off with the tide, for now he could hear their voices. In fact, he reflected, he'd heard their voices for some time past. He sat up.

"Hullo, Angus."

There was a grunt.

Angus loomed up beside him. "Well, well, Mungo-boy." He raised a restraining hand. "Just you stay there a wee bittie longer. How are you taking?"

Mungo flexed his legs: one of them felt rather stiff. "All right, I think."

He put up a hand to his face and the hand came away tacky. "A bit cut about, but all in one piece."

Donald said, "Will I go now, Angus?"

Angus hesitated.

Mungo looked at the dark, huddled-up shape on the grassy verge beside Donald.

"Is he bad?"

"Aye. Aye, he's bad." Angus coughed. "His legs is crunched." He breathed heavily. "And above his legs—above his legs is not very nice. The boat—it will have dropped on him, you understand.

"He wakes every now and then," said Angus softly. "You'll be hearing him every so often." He sat down. "Do you imagine you'd be all right if we were to leave you with him?"

"Leave me? Yes. Yes, of course. What were you thinking of?"

Angus cleared his throat.

"Donald and me was thinking that Donald had best go over the island for help. But it's not easy. There's four or five miles to the village—over the hills and the peat-hags, you understand? It would not be just so easy for Donald to find where he's left us." Angus rocked back and forth. "It might be the best if I was to go half the distance with Donald. Then—then in a couple of hours or so you yourself could possibly go to the top of the cliffs back there. You could give out a shout every wee whilie perhaps. To guide us, you understand?"

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Mungo looked up at the cliffs. "Whatever you say, Angus."

Angus rose to his feet and rubbed at his back.

Just then Joe started to scream.

Silent, the two of them had been standing up on the cliff edge for some time past.

Seen from this height and under the bright hard sun it all looked very different this afternoon as, from a clear-cut horizon, the sea curved in, blue, green, and here and there flashing a white reminder, to surge round the reefs that jutted out black and creamily fringed and then to burst in leisurely fashion along the boulder-strewn shore where, jammed into cracks and ravines, the separate pieces of junk that together had once been the *Poosie Nancy* lay distributed over two miles.

Presently Angus pulled out a handkerchief. "Well, well," he said.

Mungo said nothing.

Angus said, "I suppose we'd as well go back."

Mungo said, "I suppose we had, Angus."

Angus blew his nose strengthily.

"It is very sad about Joe."

Mungo said, "Very sad, Angus."

A swarming of gulls tumbled effortlessly up the air-pocket facing the cliffs and, clearing the top, broke apart then swerved individually inland.

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Angus returned the handkerchief to his pocket. Mungo continued to gaze at a charred mattress that lay on the grassy verge down below.

"What will you do now, Angus?"

Angus flexed an elderly hand over his forehead. "Och, I'm not at all sure." He lifted the unfamiliar borrowed blue jersey and scratched at his chest underneath. "What will you do yourself, Mungo-boy?"

Mungo said, "Me?" He shrugged. "I suppose I'll go back to London."

The gulls swung back and over their heads and out, screamed, then somersaulted downwards.

"Well, well," said Angus. "You're a young man, Mungo-boy. Remember that."

Mungo said nothing.

Presently they turned away.

★ ***The First Part of David Walker's enthralling new novel, "Harry Black," appears in next month's Argosy on sale December 9th.***

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to POT LUCK on page 23

1. *All are true*
2. *a. An oriel is a projecting window of an upper storey, a dormer is a projecting straight window in a roof; b. Clinker-built is with planks overlapping, carvel-built with planks flush; c. Piebald is patches of two different colours, skewbald is patches of white and another colour*
3. *Boynton, Klapka, Schwenk, Stearns*
4. *Pipe-line under the Ocean; Fog Investigation Dispersal Operation; Allied Submarine-Detection Investigation Committee*
5. *Motor, hotel; tiger, lion*
6. *a. and B; b and A; c and C;*
7. *a. Travellers' Joy, wild clematis; b. amaranth; c. fennel; d. Heart's-ease, pansy; e. willow-herb*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Trippers.* 5, *Tom-tit.* 9, *Lackaday.* 10, *Bosses.* 12, *Nimshi.* 13, *Undulant.* 14, *Brush and comb.* 18, *Gin and French.* 23, *Pear tree.* 24, *Borage.* 26, *Alight.* 27, *Outdated.* 28, *To task.* 29, *Prudence.*

Down. 1, *Talent.* 2, *Income.* 3, *Poacher.* 4, *Real.* 6, *Orotund.* 7, *Testator.* 8, *Test-tube.* 11, *Inmate.* 15, *Suffer.* 16, *Egg-plant.* 17, *Annalist.* 19, *Notches.* 20, *Clouded.* 21, *Batten.* 22, *Beadle.* 25, *Burr.*

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

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Solution on Page 143

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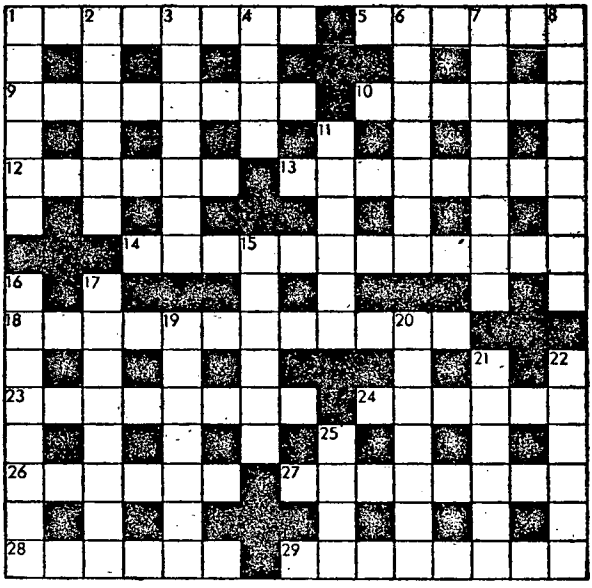

CLUES

Across

1 Do they fall over themselves to go on holiday ? (8).

5 Famous singer of a " willow song " (3-3).

9 Alas ! we've lost 24 hours (8).

10 Masterful ornaments (6).

12 Father of a furious driver (6).

13 A dun tuna plus fifty won't give you a straight answer (8).

14 Fox and cock make a team on the dressing-table (5, 3, 4).

18 With language added, the trap becomes alcoholic (3, 3, 6).

23 Perch for a partridge (4, 4).

24 This herb, it seems, doesn't interest the elderly (6).

26 Get down, it's on fire ! (6).

27 Beaten in the history quiz, perhaps ? (8).

28 If you're taken this way, it's a rebuke (2, 4).

29 This girl is caution personified (8).

Down

1 Latent ability ? (6).

2 We like to see it come in in reverse (6).

3 A thief who practises one branch of egg cookery, apparently (7).

4 This Spanish coin must be genuine (4).

6 The initial vowel is followed by a description of itself (7).

7 Try a feature of the Devon landscape—will you ? (8).

8 This Underground line for the cricket match ! (4-4).

11 Even a thin material can hide the answer (6).

15 Permit (6).

16 But its fruit doesn't break when you drop it (3-5).

17 The girl and her catalogue add up to the compiler (8).

19 A sticky method of keeping records (7).

20 Cold due ? Certainly it's not sunny (7).

21 To feed greedily, not lightly (6).

22 Bumble, for instance ? (6).

25 It's hard to shake off this trick of speech (4).

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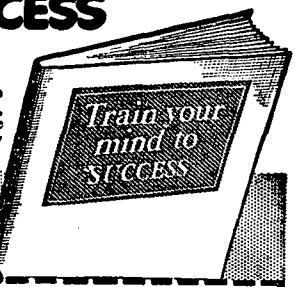

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PRACTICAL RESULTS

Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN**. One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH**. The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL**. Thanks for the recommendation.

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